

THE HUNGERS

Panther
3/6



THE LAUGH WAS
ON LAZARUS
JOHN GARFORTH

An original novel based on
the ABC Television series

AVENGERS

THE LAUGH WAS ON LAZARUS

JOHN GARFORTH

The Laugh was on Lazarus

A Panther Book

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CHAPTER ONE

I didn't mean to kill the man. But I lose control sometimes. I go wild, smash up my playthings and spit at the crowds. Then they take me off to the sanatorium and I'm petted for a few days. I suppose I'm not really safe. But since I killed that man they've kept me behind bars, and they've decided to kill me as well.

I don't mind them killing me. Things aren't the same any more. Perhaps that's why I lose control, because I'm frustrated. In the old days, when I was young, I was a star. The crowds used to flock to see me perform, and I was petted all the time. Bimbo and Betty were with me and we used to be really happy. Button was also with us, but Button was surly and we used to throw our tea at him when we'd had enough. It was fun in those days. And Hodgkins used to look after us. But he's dead now.

Sometimes when I'm lying here on the straw matting I can still hear the children's laughter, the ooing and ahing, the applause... I can remember how comfortable it was being curled up asleep with Betty, she smelled so warm and alive. I suppose we just grew older - grew up. The tricks are more difficult as you grow older, and you don't feel like all those acrobatics.

It all came to an end when Bimbo went wild and attacked Hodgkins. One summer evening after the people had gone and we could hear the music from a radio in the flats opposite because it was hot and the windows were open. Hodgkins came in to see us before he went home and Betty ran forward to greet him. She used to throw her arms round his neck... But that particular evening Bimbo threw a jealous fit. It was all very silly. And we were separated after that.

I can still see Bimbo and Betty when I go past their place to the sanatorium. Sometimes I call out and they answer. But I get terribly lonely. It's the boredom I can't stand. I can hear all the life going on around me, I can see people playing in the park, and I remember the fun I once had. I don't know why it had to change.

So I don't mind if they kill me. It will be better than being cooped up in here. The long monotonous days, with the dreary rhythm of one meal and then the next and waiting, not even feeling hungry. Sleeping, because that passes the time.

That night last week I knew that something was wrong, because all the animals were fidgeting and the gibbons started up with those whooping screams. He wasn't an ordinary man, there was something wrong with his smell that even the elephants found disturbing. He frightened them all.

He must have climbed over the wall just after midnight. But the moon was out and there were lots of stars in the sky, so when the sense of fear in the air woke me up I could see someone moving about on the far side of the gardens.

He was frightening. He walked in a jerky, angular way, and he moved his head as if he had decided to move his head in that direction - it wasn't natural. And as he came close I could see the expression on his face, staring, with unseeing eyes, and his mouth twitched. I thought for a while that he couldn't see me, but I was wrong. He had come to fetch me.

The man stopped by the door and read the name plate, then without looking at me he started fiddling with the lock. During those few minutes I suppose I worked up a fit of panic. He had such a cold smell about him, and when the door was forced open and he came in his touch was icy. That was why I panicked. It wasn't just that I'm unreliable.

He had a needle like they use in the sanatorium and he was going to use it on me. But I was already throwing a fit by then, because he was so disturbing. I cowered in the corner until I knew he was definitely after me, and then I attacked him. I screamed, because somebody might have come to help me, then I picked him up and threw him at the door. He felt so cold and clammy that I lost control. I jumped on his stomach and punched him, clawed him, and then after he had gone limp I threw him around and battered him against the walls.

It was odd, because even before he went limp he never said a word or made a sound. There was nothing natural about him at all. So I tore all his clothes and scattered his belongings around the floor. I ate a shiny metal thing on his jacket, or rather I swallowed it, because I was biting at the cloth. I got really carried away.

Then I went outside, and after a long time I calmed down. I was still frightened, and I didn't know what to do, but eventually my mind was working normally again. The animals had quietened down and London was silent. It almost seemed as if nothing had happened.

I went along to see Betty and Bimbo; not that they would be able to help, but I just went to see them. They were pleased to see me, but they couldn't help. They made all the right noises, and I felt sad because we used to be so happy together, but there was nothing they could do.

After a while I went back. The man was still there, he hadn't moved. So I climbed up a nearby tree and stayed there for the rest of the night. I didn't sleep; I simply waited until the sun came up, and when it was light I felt better. I thought about running away, but I ran away once before and they only brought me back. I stayed until Ibbotson came on duty.

Ibbotson was the new man who came when Hodgkins died, and I rushed up

to him, because I thought he would be able to settle it all. But he was horrified, and at first I thought he would hit me. Then when he found the man he took me into the main building and locked me up. He wasn't sympathetic.

There was a lot of running around that day. And the upcome of it was that they brought me here, and said I was going to be killed. I chattered away and tried to make them understand, but nobody was interested. They had problems of their own. And now all these people in white coats keep coming around, and they say that I'll have to be killed because public opinion wants to see it. But I don't care about public opinion.

I'll be glad when I die.

CHAPTER TWO

Steed enjoyed these early mornings in April. The sun was shining warmly for the first time since October, and that exhilarated the old bones. Spring had come and the barren winter was visibly over. To someone of his cynical disposition it was reassuring to see the renewal of life, the cycle of birth and death continued. He patted a small elephant on the head and waved to a polar bear. The smell of change was in the air at London Zoo.

A camel came loping awkwardly round the corner of the reptile house, with a lady between its humps. Steed backed away - he preferred his visions of beauty from a safe distance. The camel was an ugly creature with the face of a bad tempered, backward horse and it lacked grace. The woman was tawny haired, oval faced, and her flashing temperament was communicated in her physical bearing. Even the porridge coloured cashmere cloak she was wearing with its hood lined in nutrea seemed deliberately chosen to tantalise the goats.

"Mrs. Peel," Steed called at last, "we're needed!"

She tapped the camel on the neck and it lurched forward, buckled its legs and waited while she skipped to the ground. "I haven't ridden a camel," she announced, "since I was in Arabia four years ago."

"Quite right," said Steed. "The motor car is faster, more comfortable, and it isn't likely to eat you when your back is turned." He prodded the camel away with his rolled umbrella and then took Mrs. Peel by the arm. "Did you read about the man who was killed here three nights ago?"

"Yes. Very odd." They walked leisurely across the canal bridge, glancing incredulously at the orange rumped agoutis and pausing to watch the sinister collection of owls, making eventually for the sanatorium at the far side. "I'd like to go back to Africa for a few months next year," Emma Peel said nostalgically. "Did I tell you about the tiger I bagged when I was twenty-two?"

"No. What did it taste like?"

A Fellow of the Zoological Society was passing them on the sanatorium steps and he snorted his disapproval. "Quite right," said Steed. "No wonder that chimpanzee took no chances when the man broke into his cage." They went along the passage to the head office.

A man in a white coat sprang up as they opened the door and introduced himself as Dr. Heinecke. "The charming Mrs. Peel!" he cried. He was Viennese. "Delighted. Good morning, Mr. Steed. Is it not a delightful morning, no?"

"Spring and all that," said Steed.

"Delightful. A man in *The Times* heard the first cuckoo last Monday. Let me take you through to our criminal. He is in solitary confinement. Yes, the animals are growing restive. It will soon be the normal mating season...."

The chimpanzee stared apathetically at them and they stared back. Soon it lost interest and began picking its feet. Steed found it irrationally hard to imagine the animal killing a man - he was accustomed to thinking of chimps advertising tea, stealing the show at a circus, and helping Tarzan with the housework.

"When they are eight or nine years old they experience puberty," said Dr. Heinecke, "and after that they can be highly dangerous. They are subject to violent fits of bad temper and they are jealous of their females, rather as homo sapiens are, except that chimpanzees are much more powerful. We shall have to put him down, I regret."

"For murder?" Steed asked wryly. "I thought capital punishment had been abolished everywhere."

"Only for people. We have to reassure the public...."

Emma Peel had put her hand through the bars and was stroking its head. "What was the idea," she asked "Did the man want to kidnap him?"

Dr. Heinecke explained that a hypodermic syringe had been found in the cage, and a van had been left in the Ring Road. "So we assume the intention was to kidnap the chimpanzee."

"The van?" asked Emma.

"Stolen," said Steed.

"Where from?"

"The London Zoo."

"Clever."

"The man's name was Frank Hammond."

"Is that significant?"

"Yes. That's how we come into it." Steed noticed that the chimpanzee hadn't chewed Emma's hand; in fact he seemed to be smiling in response. "Dr. Heinecke, I'd rather you didn't slaughter this animal until we've discovered more about the incident. He might be able to help us."

The chimpanzee stood up in his cage and pushed a paw through the bars towards Steed. Steed shook hands and then left.

"Frank Hammond," Steed explained when they were safely away from listening humans, "worked as a porter for the Institute of Scientific Research. He worked there for thirty years, hadn't a stain on his character, took no private interest in the work and had no criminal associations. Can I buy you an ice cream?"

"In April? You can buy me some peanuts and we'll go and feed the gibbons."

The gibbons were swinging about in their massive cage, whooping and making more noise than any other animals in the zoo. There was a young one as well as the usual three; and one of the usual three stayed up at the far end of the cage as if he was jealous of the happy family.

"So he was a porter," Emma said eventually. "Does that make it a national emergency?"

"It might," said Steed. "You see, he died four months ago."

CHAPTER THREE

"He died four months ago from a heart attack. I ain't seen him since. Well, I mean they buried him, didn't they? Not that I saw much of him before he died, he was always down the boozier or off to the dogs." She suddenly smiled. "Would you like a drink, dear?"

Emma looked across the shabby room to the large barrel of stout in the corner. The bereaved widow was aspiring to the life of luxury. She even had a new radiogram with chromium decorations along the front.

"No thank you, Mrs. Hammond."

The home was in a sooty block of tenement flats behind Camden Town, and conversation stopped every three minutes while a main line train clattered past on its way to Edinburgh or Manchester. The dark stairs up to the fifth floor were littered with tricycles and children and empty milk bottles. But Mrs. Hammond had never had it, as the man once said, so good. She lit another cigarette from a box of a hundred, coughed for a while, and then poured herself a glass of stout.

"I can afford my little comforts now," she said, "now that Frank's kicked off."

"I must say you've accepted his death very bravely -"

"Don't tell me, duckie, I laughed all through the funeral. I'd have been pleased enough to be rid of the miserable devil for nothing, but then the insurance people paid me two thousand pounds."

"That's a lot of money."

"Eric is helping me to look after it. Eric is our lodger."

Mrs. Hammond sipped at her stout while her eyes flickered from Emma to the silent television screen and back. She had turned down the sound (by remote control) when Emma had asked whether Frank had suffered from a weak heart in the past and where he had been when he died.

"Why are you asking me all these questions?" the woman suddenly demanded.

"Somebody thinks he saw your husband last Wednesday."

Mrs. Hammond had a pointed chin and a pointed nose, and when she started blinking suspiciously she looked like a nervous, middle-aged fox. "Who are you anyway?" she asked sharply. "Are you trying to take my money away from me? Frank died at work and everybody saw him, doctors work at that institute, and then they buried him. You can't have that money back! I thought you were one of those social workers. I didn't know you were a snooper!"

"I'm not interested in your money -"

"No, I bet you ain't. It's all right for you with your fancy boots and that gestapo uniform! I suppose your husband's a bleedin' ballet dancer. What do you know about the likes of me and Eric? I worked fourteen hours a day since I was fifteen years old and I never got more than eight quid a week. What do you know about all that, Miss Fancy Boots? Because I'm not never going to part with my money. I earned it, being married to Frank."

Emma was shocked by the woman's sudden aggression, and slightly hurt as well, she didn't know why. "Perhaps I will have a glass of stout. Thank you." She smiled radiantly.

Mrs. Hammond looked bewildered, then poured Emma a glass.

"The reason I came to see you, Mrs. Hammond, was purely to ask for your advice." Another radiant smile. They worked wonders. "Obviously nobody can have seen your husband. But can you think of an explanation? You know, did he have a twin brother, or why should anybody impersonate him?"

"All I know is that if Frank turned up here again I'd bloody murder him."

Emma found half a pint too much to knock back quickly so she had to think of more questions. But there was nothing to be learned from Mrs. Hammond. She had buried her husband, given him a decent sendoff, and now she was finished with him. She didn't believe in resurrection.

"I'm all right, see; I've got a nice quiet lodger who doesn't tell me what to do, and he doesn't poke me about when I want to go to sleep. I'm keeping it this way."

She flicked the switch on the arm of the chair and the sound blared out from the television set. The interlude for nostalgia was over. Emma thanked her inaudibly for the stout and went outside. The bicycles, milk bottles and kids were still there on the stairs.

The four people round the graveside watched in silence while the gravedigger tossed the loose earth to one side. Steed found it a hypnotic sight, like a funeral being run backwards, and the vicar was muttering ritual absolutions to himself. The sun had gone down, it was five o'clock, and Emma was looking slightly purple. But they waited until the coffin was reached.

Steed was disappointed that at least a skull wasn't thrown up during the operation. None of the alas-poor-Yorick business. The earth had been well turned over, recently, and the coffin was easy to lift out. Easy to crack open. It was empty.

"Well," said Emma, "we didn't expect him to be in there."

"Somebody might have been in there," said Steed. "Or there might have been a hundred-weight of scrap metal. At least we know that Hammond was

buried...."

"Like Houdini."

The police sergeant solemnly made a note in his notebook, then he padded off to fetch the fingerprint men and the photographers. Steed told him that if anything turned up within the next half hour he'd be in the Dragon with Mrs. Peel. The sergeant raised two fingers to his helmet and said sir.

"They do a nice line in cold snacks," Steed explained. "I recommend the jambon persille de bourgogne; it isn't their recipe - Roderick stole it quite shamelessly from a little place in Dijon, but he does it very well."

Emma found him frequently insufferable on food, so she quickly tried to cap his expertise. "The Restaurant des Trois Faisans is not a little place. But as it's Easter next week I'll try some."

The pub itself was comfortably old, with brass bed pans and fussy oak carvings, a lot of postcards around to Dear Roderick from people like Sammy Davis Jr. and a few silver tankards owned by the regular customers. Roderick was like his pub, fresh from the King's Road, Chelsea. You wouldn't guess he was nearly fifty unless you looked at him twice. He had a line in autobiography about being seduced by the Turks, which Steed told her he'd dreamed up during the boring bits of *Lawrence of Arabia*. That was probably out of revenge because Roderick called Steed the last of the real Edwardians.

"A Campari with ice and a segment of peeled lemon," said Emma. "And some of that ham in parsley jelly." She had the satisfaction of watching Steed turn pale.

The food was indeed worthy of the Duke of Burgundy, and a second Campari completed Emma's feeling of satisfaction with the world. It was dark outside, they were sitting next to a blazing log fire, and the locals were trickling in, huddling in groups and adding to the atmosphere of Dickensian London. All that was needed now was somebody to lead off with a few ghost stories.

"I see they're digging up another body," the oldest inhabitant announced to the world at large. "Another poor bugger must have escaped." He cackled to himself, sloped some bitter down his whiskers, and nodded to himself with satisfaction. "I reckon there's hope for me yet."

"Who is it this time?" asked Roderick.

"I don't know, do I? There's a bluebottle guarding the grave. I went up there to look, but they were all trying to take the stiff's fingerprints. I reckon it must be against the law to rise from the dead. Once is enough, eh?" He cackled and spilt some more bitter down his whiskers. "Who moved the stone, eh?"

The hilarity didn't really catch on. The younger people in the bar, those between thirty and fifty, didn't find death such a joke. They made a few remarks

about dirty work and cross roads, de mortuis nil nisi, and something should be done about it.

"After all," said Roderick when Steed had beckoned him over to join them, "they can't be beautiful, can they? Dorian Gray is one thing, perpetually twenty-one, as I am myself, but these creatures must be all decayed and damaged. I had a nightmare the other night... no, thank you, dear, I have to watch my weight... and I saw them all grey with yellow teeth. Well, I mean! I'd rather die as soon as I lose my complexion. You know what I mean, don't you, darling?"

Emma nodded amiably.

"She hasn't taken to me! And I'm usually so good with women. Older women, perhaps. Well, I'm rattled tonight - you must make allowances. I always found zombies upsetting, even when I was young and I wanted to die before thirty. Come back tomorrow, darling, and I'll try to amuse you. I used to know a girl like you, all black and severe, the strict disciplinarian governess type, but then I found I scarred easily."

"When did all this start?" Steed asked tactfully, "about zombies, I mean."

"There have always been legends. I suppose there are legends about any large cemetery, and this is enormous. But for about three months we've had cranks claiming that the gates open at one in the morning and all the corpses go off into north London. Back before cock crow, of course. Personally I don't really go much for it. I just keep my fingers crossed and say that it's impossible."

"Any particular zombies?"

"No. There aren't many famous bodies buried there. But if this catches on we'll have a communist revival party who believe that Karl Marx has returned and all kinds of George-Eliot-Lives and Galsworthy-is-Back movements will centre on the cemetery. So far it's only a local legend."

"How did it all start?"

Roderick curled his pink lips in distaste. "Two young people came into the bar at about ten o'clock. I suppose they'd been making love - or whatever people like that do, and they'd seen a catacomb door open. They fled, of course. I mean, what can you expect, with all these adolescents coupling and copulating in the long grass? They ought to keep a closer watch on the place."

Emma yawned. A third Campari was having its effect on her. "There's a poetic appropriateness in making love among the tombstones."

"Poetry," said Roderick, "should never be so strenuous."

The yellow street lamps were visible in a misty haze and the air was damp when they came out of the pub. Across the road were the gothic gates and the silhouette of a baroque funeral chapel. And the black nothingness beyond, stretching up-hill for half a mile, was the cemetery, full of strange noises,

creaking trees and rustling bushes, and the awful stillness of death.

"How does the prospect of spending a night in there appeal to you?" asked Steed.

"I have to get in my eight hours," she answered quickly. "Why don't you spend the night there?"

"My dear Mrs. Peel, you know I'm afraid of the dark."

CHAPTER FOUR

Steed was not a religious man, God forbid, but he found the ceremonial of going to church on a Sunday morning pleasing. It was nicely formal, centuries old, and tastefully restrained. The boring sermon from the ineffectual vicar was reassuring affirmation of the English way of life. And of course he had known Message Morrison years ago, when Message had been responsible for the morale of Steed's company in north Africa. He had been an entirely unsuitable chaplain, dangerously eager to demonstrate his own courage and embarrassingly keen to mix with the men in the mess. But, all being right with the world now, he had found his niche in a comfortable parish in Highgate.

An additional pleasure in the expedition was that Steed could imagine hours of worry while Emma Peel tried to find something suitable to wear. She turned up in that little black number that women used to keep for such occasions.

Message Morrison looked almost impressive in his black robes, standing at the lectern reading John, xi, 38-44 in his sepulchral voice. It was a melodramatic choice for the lesson, although Steed wasn't surprised. He only wished that all vicars didn't look more or less like Alastair Sim. The high bald dome, the eyes and jowls of a sad cocker spaniel.

"The maid is not dead, but sleepeth," he intoned during the second lesson. Steed nudged Emma, but she was listening avidly.

"He's making capital of the situation," Emma whispered.

"Depends what he knows."

Steed prided himself on a useful baritone voice, and his descant on '*Day of Wrath! O day of mourning!*' rang through the eighteenth century rafters. Emma Peel filled in with a few do-a-diddies.

The sermon was taken from the Gospel according to St. Mark. ""Talitha cumi," said Christ. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given to her to eat."

Message Morrison intended that man *should* know it. He delivered a superbly Wesleyan oration on the illusion of death and the power of God to perform miracles. It was rousing stuff. The congregation was awesomely impressed. Even Steed found that for a few minutes it changed his approach to his work.

Then he learned why Message had asked him to attend the service. He had an

exhibit. "I bring you positive proof, my children," he called, "of the life hereafter. Here is a man who was raised from the dead, come to witness the word of God."

An appalled chill fell on the whole atmosphere, and as a door behind the altar opened people raised their hymn books to their mouths, mouthed silent prayers, or simply shuddered. After a moment a shuffling figure emerged to stand blinking on the chancel steps. It was, like so many of Morrison's effects, in the worst possible taste. The man was old, unshaven, in baggy, torn clothes, and when a woman moaned audibly he seemed more frightened of her than she was of him.

"This man is Jacob Burns. I found him yesterday, in the cemetery, wandering across the grass and through the tombs in a dazed condition...."

Steed grabbed Emma's hand and led her quickly from the church. They went round the side of the yard and into the vestry, where they waited. A few minutes later they watched the eighty odd people file silently out into the day. There had been no mass conversions, no scenes of hysteria, but some kind of reaction was imminent. As soon as somebody could think of a way to react....

"Steed! How good of you to come. I was told that you were nosing about in the cemetery the other day, so I sent for you as soon as I found my man. You haven't changed since forty-three! Is this your good lady?"

"No. You haven't changed either," he said bitterly.

Message Morrison shook hands with Emma and then showed his risen friend to them again. Jacob Burns looked shiftily embarrassed. "Don't be nervous, Jacob. You went over superbly. Didn't he make an impression, Steed?"

"Undoubtedly. It reminded me of the Christmas you brought a German soldier into the camp as a demonstration of brotherly love..."

Morrison shook his head. "They shouldn't have shot him." He put an apologetic hand on Jacob's shoulder. "The world doesn't understand Christianity, Mrs Peel."

"Just as well," said Emma. "I wouldn't like to give all my worldly goods to Mr. Burns." The girl who had inherited a fortune on the death of her shipping magnate father sat defiantly in the carved oak armchair and drummed her fingers on the head of a gargoyle. "What did you die of?" she demanded suddenly.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know. People like me just die, miss. We don't get fancy diseases or posh medicines."

"What did the death certificate say?"

"I wasn't in a position to read it, miss."

"When did you die?"

"I haven't been keeping check. It was before Easter."

"It's still before Easter."

"Ah, so I died recently. It was a weekday."

"Where do you live?"

"I normally sleep on the heath if the weather is fine. But I spent the winter in the Scrubs, because they look after you there."

"You didn't have a job?" Steed sighed.

"No, sir. I put it down to the government's shakeout, the wages and prices freeze -"

They became aware of a commotion in the churchyard outside. The congregation was reacting. They had decided like sensible Englishmen to hang around, phone the police, and someone with Irish blood in his veins had notified the press. Nearly a hundred people were assembled at the gates, and they were unhappy.

Soon the atheists were likely to arrive with banners denouncing eternal life.

"Message, we'll have to be quick," said Steed. "What did you intend to do with this man?"

Message beamed avuncularly. "He's yours, my dear fellow. I've proved *my* point. So take him. That's why I asked you over."

One advantage of driving about in a 1929 Bentley was that it stood up to assaults from anything less than a tactical bomb. Steed fetched it round to the vestry door, then amid angry scenes he squeezed Jacob and Emma into the back. They drove off, slowly, down the path and through the gates, and nobody stopped them. A few fists banged on the coachwork and women shouted abuse, but they got through.

"What are we going to do now?" Emma asked as they increased speed towards Kentish Town.

"I don't know. Wash our friend and put him into some clean clothes...."

"You can't interfere with me!"

"And we'll have a spot to eat. Suliman's pilaff, actually, which is a little recipe I picked up in Portugal -"

"I'm not eating any of that muck!" grated Jacob.

"We'll stop on the way for some fish and chips."

"That vicar said he'd look after me -"

"Man cannot live by bread and wine alone," said Steed vaguely. "And you'd find it very draughty living in the church. Whereas I'll let you go back to the heath tonight and you'll be able to have a good sleep."

"Death isn't a disease, or even an extreme destruction of the physical organs. It's a simple absence of life. The heart stops beating, and once that happens I assume the nerves stop communicating to the brain - or maybe the brain stops

registering the communications. Although of course the brain often stops registering while a body is still alive. And the nerves still work until the body is decayed, as you can see by passing an electric current through a corpse's organs; they still twitch. I'm afraid we don't understand much about being dead. It's just a question of keeping the heart going."

They were deep, these scientists. Steed nearly asked him to describe time, but he could guess what the answer would be. All of the world's great philosophical problems were like left and right, it was a question of describing them unambiguously.

Dr. Sir Richard Manden was a dapper man with a white vandyke beard, a fastidious man with nostrils flared in distaste. He had been principal of the Department of Scientific Research for nearly a year, since his predecessor had died. He sat in his neat office and talked like a tired schoolmaster.

"If I knew how to bring a corpse back to life," he said with a prim laugh, "I'd be a millionaire." He stopped laughing. "No, I expect I'd be put to death. But in another fifteen years we research workers might be closer to an answer...."

"Somebody knows the answer already," said Steed.

"I doubt it. There are techniques for reviving the heart, but it has to be done very soon after death, and it has seldom lasted long. A lot depends on the cause of death."

Steed told the doctor about Frank Hammond.

"What was the cause of death?"

"Heart attack," said Steed, "the first time. The second time he was attacked by a chimpanzee."

"I suppose you don't know how long he had been around, or shall we say, how soon after death he was brought back to life?"

"No. We know he was buried, so it can't have been a few hours."

"This is very interesting. I assume you know that we are doing research on the pathology of death at the department here? Top secret, but I expect most people know. The work was begun by Professor Feuer some five years ago. His death was a great blow."

"Ironic, too," said Steed.

Dr. Sir Richard Manden was not amused. "That man you mentioned, Hammond, used to work here, you say." He turned disdainfully to his files and looked up Hammond under H in the staff file. "Yes, he was in charge of the animals. We do a lot of experimental work here, and naturally the larger mammals are essential. Perhaps the fellow was mindlessly following a behaviour pattern that he had set when he was alive. After all, thirty years in the job is a long time, and he could have gone after the chimpanzee purely by instinct."

Second nature, thought Steed, like cleaning your teeth. "Perhaps you could show me round the laboratories? It seems to be relevant somehow, of that I'm absolutely certain. And also I'd probably find it reassuring. I object to the idea of dying."

Steed also resented the idea of operations, so he found little comfort in the tour. The most melodramatic exhibit was a human heart in a glass aquarium, pumping blood through a series of glass tubes with great conviction. It looked more like a giant prune than a football bladder.

"This heart could be transferred to a man who suffered from thrombosis," the doctor explained, "in theory. But in practice the operation is so complex that the patient would die. I expect the time factor is too long."

"Ah well, keep at it. And what is this unhealthy jelly fish doing in here?"

"That's a human brain. We're rather proud of it, because it is completely alive."

Steed stared at the bottle for a few moments. "Alive, eh? Fancy that." It didn't look much of a life. "What's his name?"

"Feuer."

Steed swung round in surprise. "The previous principal."

"He left his brain to the department in his will."

"Where's his body?"

"Oh, that was burned, of course."

"I wonder whether it hurt."

Steed went home feeling quite disturbed. It was all very well to have zombies pottering about London against all natural laws, but he preferred it to be an evil, supernatural phenomenon. He shuddered at the thought of all those men in white coats and the poor old monkeys and the expensive equipment, working for years to achieve eternal life in a bottle of plasma. It wasn't even symbolic.

CHAPTER FIVE

When Steed arrived at his flat in Westminster Mews it was all happening. Jacob Burns had been locked in the bathroom, Emma Peel was trying to get rid of a press conference, and a florid taxi driver was standing at the door shouting, "All right, you boys, let's have you!"

"What's going on?" Steed demanded.

"These reporters say a man called Burns is living here."

Steed waved to the name-plate on the door. "Steed," he murmured, "John Steed."

"Who's that locked in the bathroom?"

"These are very walls." He turned to the taxi driver. "What did you want?"

"It's three o'clock, sir. Time for your lunch appointment."

Benson had a habit of turning up with his phoney taxi when it was least convenient and taking Steed off to abominable meals with the man whom he insisted on calling His Nibs. The war-time cloak and dagger rituals died hard with the old man, and he could never telephone an instruction when there was time for a secret rendezvous.

"He'll have to wait while I deal with these damned journalists. Mrs. Peel! Bring out Jacob Burns." He gestured ineffectively for quiet. "Gentlemen, please, you'll get all the news you need." He turned wearily to Benson. "I only wish they'd use the ash trays. Would you mind popping into the kitchen and fetching that bottle of whisky from the larder? It was given to me by an aunt last Christmas."

The keen newspapermen clustered round Jacob Burns and shouted questions. A photographer clambered on to the cherry wood table and danced about yelling, "Over here, Jake!" until Steed hooked him off with a clever twist of his umbrella. The scrum only broke up when the whisky appeared. Then Jacob had a chance to speak.

"Being dead's like anything else, you get used to it.... I was found in the cemetery by that vicar bloke and he gave me a breakfast.... I'd been dead for three days."

"What about an exclusive, Jake? Fifty pounds."

"A hundred."

"Hundred and fifty!"

Suddenly the keen news-hounds stampeded to the phone to ask their editors

how much they could bid, and while they were snatching the receiver from each other and shouting down the extension in the hall... the reporter who had offered a hundred slipped out of the flat with Jacob Burns. The place emptied in five seconds.

"What about that lunch appointment, Mr. S.?"

Steed grinned at Emma Peel. "Don't look so worried, Mrs. Peel. They'll soon find that Jacob was a fraud. I've been doing some research. The poor fellow was never buried, and he never had a death certificate. My friend Message Morrison was precipitate as always."

"There's more to it than that, Steed." She looked very serious in her glittering silver Lurex suit and Vivier boots. "I think I'll follow with the reporters."

In the taxi a few minutes later Benson chuckled and wagged his head appreciatively. "That's what I call a woman, that is. A real silver streak, she is." He chuckled again and then whistled. "Told those reporters you were a friend of her father."

"I was," Steed snapped.

"Catches the light like the flash of a guillotine blade."

"You don't have to keep up the polite conversation," said Steed. "I could bear to travel in silence."

Benson wagged his head. "Can't blame me for being envious, Mr. S. The life of Riley, that's what you've got, with all these fast international women spies and the slap-up meals at the Ritz. You should see my old woman some time, come round and have bangers and mash some evening."

"Who is Riley?"

They drove straight past the Ritz and came to a halt ten minutes later outside a vegetarian restaurant. "His Nibs is on a health food diet this week," explained Benson. "But he says the grub's just as good. As long as you don't make a pig of yourself."

"I shan't."

He pushed through the swing doors feeling distinctly alien to the place. He remembered one of those emotionally loaded lists that George Orwell had compiled, grouping together vegetarians, fruit juice drinkers, pacifists, fellow travellers.... Would they recognise Steed as an imposter? There didn't seem to be any men with short corduroy trousers and hairy knees, and none of them had a haversack on his back.

A square set, iron-grey-haired man looked up from his nut cutlet and waved. "Steed, my boy. Glad you arrived in time to eat. Sit down. How are you?"

"Thank you, sir, I'm extremely fit."

"Really?" He scrutinised Steed. "You look all right, but it's time you watched

the blood pressure. I read the other day that twenty per cent of the population die of heart diseases. Meat, brandy, that sort of thing, you see. And what about those odd cigar things you smoke? I'm worried about you, Steed. You're forty-five and that's a dangerous age."

"Nice of you to care, sir, but -"

"I'm thinking of instructing our accountant to allow lunch and dinner expenses only at this restaurant."

Steed smiled weakly. "It would treble the travel expenses. Better make it a general recommendation, sir." Steed shook his head as the waiter approached with the menu. "No thanks, I ate before I knew I was coming here. Just bring me a pot of tea."

The old man looked angry. "What did you have, a T.V. dinner for one? That's what I mean, Steed, you never have a decent meal. No wonder you look ill." He scooped up a spoonful of nut cutlet and ate it ravenously, as if he were making a commercial. "What are all these dead people doing in London?" he demanded curtly.

"I don't know, sir. The one who made the lunch time news was an imposter. He hadn't been brought back to life at all."

"You mean he was still dead?"

"He had always been alive. The rest is Frank Hammond and rumour. Do you know Dr. Sir Richard Manden?"

"Yes, he's a bureaucrat. Sort of fellow to be put in charge of that department; he'll squander money on those boffins and probably kill us all, but he's not a criminal. No ambition, that's his trouble. Surely you don't think he's behind all this?"

"I doubt it. I was struck by the coincidence, that's all, because his department is working on the pathology of death."

"Why doesn't he try to cure rheumatism?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Rhetorical question, Steed. Relax, don't try to give all the answers. Look at all these people around you thoroughly relaxed, every one of them. I had a check run on Manden several weeks ago, because too many people in his orbit were dying. The Minister wanted to know why. You know, perhaps they were subject to excessive radiation and that sort of thing, or perhaps it was foul play."

Steed sipped his lemon tea and waited for the conclusion.

"There was nothing whatever wrong with the place. I told the Minister he attached too much importance to statistics. We put a man in the department, of course, and he reported the place above suspicion."

"Is he still alive?"

"Yes. He's still there. He's a vegetarian!"

But Jacob Burns was dead now. He was lying in the empty grave where Frank Hammond should have been. His arms were crossed over his chest and his hands were holding his severed head. And a wooden stake had been driven through his heart. There was a note pinned on his stomach saying, "Now try it again."

The reporters were swarming about and the photographers were climbing over each other while Emma Peel went back to her car. She didn't see much point in ringing for an ambulance. She just tried to put the sight of Jacob's head out of her mind and concentrate on remembering what that reporter had looked like.

CHAPTER SIX

When Steed came out of the vegetarian restaurant it was raining heavily and he had only his dress umbrella with him. Damn. Benson had driven off with his master to a secret destination - like home. A clap of thunder reverberated across the sky and a few seconds later a fork of lightning licked towards the Post Office tower. It missed. The streets were quickly empty, the occasional taxis were engaged.

He waited in the doorway, but the downpour continued. Steed cursed himself for not bringing his umbrella, the one he used when it rained. There was no alternative, however, he would have to use this one. He sighed, undid the button and opened it up. An umbrella is never the same when it has been unfurled. He would have to nip along to St. James's Street in the morning to buy a new one.

At Leicester Square station he telephoned Emma Peel to be certain she was safe. He had a recurring nightmare about Emma, in which she was tied to railway lines in the path of an express train, and sometimes she was suspended over a cliff three hundred feet high. Her chirpy voice as she answered the phone was vaguely irritating. He wondered what had happened to Pearl White.

"It's been pretty disastrous for me as well," said Steed, "I've ruined a new umbrella."

He listened to her account of Jacob's death and then agreed to have supper at her pent-house.

It was one of those glass walled places that in Switzerland are on the side of mountains, and as this was at the top of a block of flats on the highest point of Hampstead the effect was much the same. You looked out across the city, nestling down in the Thames valley, and you felt as powerful as an eagle. The lights of London were very small and people were like ants, busily moving in those illuminated trains or passing in an aeroplane. It had to be bad for Emma's ego.

"I'm glad you came," she said simply.

"My pleasure." He hung up his bowler hat and his coat, put his umbrella in the bath, and then stared at the windows. Something was wrong. "I know," he said at last, "you need a pair of windscreen wipers. We can't see where we're going."

"If you start that again," Emma said warningly, "I'll remind you of the bruises I collected from the beams of your old cottage in Wiltshire. A lot has been

learned about plumbing since 1573."

Steed grinned and sat on an orange sofa designed for six people to sleep on. He didn't say anything; but he always found it odd when a residence this size wasn't divided into rooms. There were different levels and there were partitions, so that you knew whether to eat or paint a picture or watch television, but apart from unspeakable places like the sink, the lavatory and the bed, which were walled off, you couldn't escape from anybody.

"Are you painting at the moment," he asked, "potting or sculpting?" She was a talented girl. There was a block of stone in the middle of the room as well, which could be awkward if any of her friends arrived with an Afghan hound.

"It's lucky you're staying to supper," she said with an easy smile. "There's a programme on the box about zombies which we ought to see."

Steed wondered whether he had been wise when he sat down at the table and found it loaded with apples, bananas and crusty rolls. He was then given a glass of tomato juice. "Have you been reading about the number of people who die from heart diseases?" he asked cautiously. But then he was given a massive steak, rare as he liked it, and he realised they were eating American. Why else would he get a green salad and saute potatoes?

"I've been trying this infra-red cooking," Emma told him after he had tasted it and expressed his approval. "I'm rather pleased with the results."

"Why not? Science is everywhere, you can't escape it. So long as they don't invent a chemical wine...."

Emma Peel was tucking into her steak with outrageous disregard for that slim, boyish figure. Then she paused. "Why do you think they murdered Jacob Burns?" she asked.

Steed held up a reproving finger. "Please. Don't spoil this luxury." He sipped the glass of red wine, his confidence restored, and knew that it was Chateau Mouton-Rothschild. "Almost a sin," he quoted, "to drink a wine from Pauillac before it is at least ten years old. 1945?"

Emma laughed delightedly. "How did you know?"

"Because the best year before 1945 was 1937 and there are very few bottles left. I guessed it had to be 1945...."

Her face clouded over briefly, and Steed knew that she was remembering her husband stocking out the cellar with impeccable taste. She had still not entirely recovered from that afternoon when his test plane had disintegrated in the air at a speed beyond the sound barrier. It had been made worse, in a curious way, because at that speed and that height of course none of his body had been recovered. She still thought of him as he had climbed into the cockpit and waved dashing.... But there's nothing you can say to a girl by way of comfort. And

probably her courage derived from the wound.

He launched into a few amusing anecdotes about Roderick Pearson and the Chelsea scene. "He bought the pub in Highgate a few years ago when, as he claimed, the sexes merged and he made a pass at an amenable young creature who turned out to be a girl. Poor Roderick is easily shocked. That's right, smile. I like Roderick because he tells me when I'm being pompous."

"Don't be pompous," said Emma.

Steed laughed. "All right, so let's watch television. No, no, I have a better idea. Is that a harpsichord over there? I love the harpsichord. We'll have a Victorian half hour and you will play and I will listen as I sip my brandy."

They didn't discuss Jacob Burns for another hour. The brandy was good and Emma played with great proficiency. It was one of those evenings when Steed resented being a bachelor. He enjoyed the company so much, and yet he knew, as he had always known, that an undercover man does not fall in love. First rule of the game. He wondered whether Telemann had led a happy life: laughing children, contented wife, the little comforts....

"Burns was a tramp," he announced when the recital was over and he was pouring himself another brandy. "He can't have been killed for any sane reason. He must have just got in the way, by claiming to be a zombie when he wasn't."

Jacob Burns was one of those doomed babies born in 1900, new people who expected a better world and thought their birth was a sign. A twentieth-century child, who had seen the first world war at the age of fourteen and lost his father in France a year later. At the age of eighteen it had all seemed like a new dawn, until 1926 and three years of unemployment in the building trade. It had become a habit. In the nineteen thirties he had twice been lucky and got a job, and twice he had lost it. They were hard times for everyone, and a lot of people wanted his jobs. The problem started in 1940 when he was pushed into a munitions factory and told to work for the nation. Which nation? He was told about the war effort and the nasty Germans. Oh yeah? They told him the difference between Hitler and Neville Chamberlain, but it was all the same to Jacob. Then everyone came back from the war and he got pushed out again. At least one twentieth-century child had never collected his birthright.

"There are times, Steed, when you sentimentalise."

It was true. It only meant he was relaxed. But he pulled himself together and stuck to the facts. "Well, Jacob used to sleep in the cemetery because on the heath he was frequently interfered with by the police. They patrol the heath at night. So Jacob was asleep in the cemetery and he didn't know that there was a big scare on. He didn't know what was happening when Message Morrison found him on Saturday morning and talked about life after death. But he played

along, said yes in the right places and ate his cornflakes, agreed to make an appearance in church. He thought perhaps he had come into his birthright."

But he had been killed immediately; he had no right. In an age of faith he would have gone to hell because heaven would have over-awed him. The only consolation that Steed could think of was that if he had been born in the year 2,000 his lot would have been even worse.

Emma Peel was smiling broadly. "He wasn't killed by God or society," she said reprovingly, "he was killed by a thick-set man of about forty with sandy hair and a slight Scottish accent who was posing as a newspaper reporter."

"Did the other reporters know him?"

"No, they'd never seen him before."

The television set was concealed in a wall cupboard, and at 9.30 p.m. Emma unveiled it to watch the zombie programme. All part of the cosy domestic evening, Steed thought. He lit a panatella and waited to be illuminated. Emma was curled up on the carpet in due submission. The lights dimmed. And then a face appeared on the screen. Smiling.

"Buy what?" Steed asked uneasily.

"It's a soap powder. Just another form of salvation."

At last the advertisements were over and the serious programme began with a dramatic shot of a cemetery, in the distance a funeral cortege moving slowly along the skyline, and music that was all cellos, a marching drum beat and an echo of the Last Post. Very sinister. "We're bringing you this special programme tonight," said a serious voice, "because all over north London there is something happening!" At which cryptic point the picture showed a serious young man standing outside Message Morrison's church with a microphone in his hand.

"This morning, in this church, the Reverend Maurice Morrison created the biggest sensation in church history...." And all that. The picture changed after a while. Message Morrison in full clerical garb, puffing a churchwarden in his book-lined study, explained seriously how he had found Jacob Burns in the cemetery.

"There had been rumours for more than a week of peculiar goings-on in the cemetery, so naturally I had this at the back of my mind when I found Jacob. He was suffering from exposure and he claimed to have been there since Wednesday. Dead. He couldn't account for the missing three days. I suppose I should have been more sceptical, but everybody was talking so much about these dead men -"

Then it was the turn of the serious young man again, standing this time by the gates of the cemetery with the microphone in his hand. He was in front of nearly a hundred sightseers, whom he described as a seriously alarmed public.

"Look, there he is!" shouted Emma. "That's the man who ran off with Jacob!"

A man on the fringe of the crowd had suddenly broken away and was hurrying up the hill beside the tombstones. But it was the commercial break now and as Steed rose to his feet he was adjured to eat somebody's dog food.

"Fetch your coat," Steed snapped.

Emma ran up to the next level and changed her shoes while Steed watched the next item; an interview with an authority on Caucasian myths. As they hurried from the flat Steed caught a reference to "the mystery man who smuggled Jacob Burns from the church this morning, an ex-intelligence officer whose present life is shrouded in secrecy." Nearly as good as a mention in despatches.

CHAPTER SEVEN

There were no crowds outside the graveyard now. The television programme had clearly been filmed before nightfall and there were only two real hopes in this excursion. The main one arose from Steed's conviction that the fake reporter had been lurking about before the cameras because he had been hiding nearby, and curiosity had lured him out. The other hope was that he would discover what was going on in the cemetery. Rumours don't centre on one cemetery for no reason. And zombies don't just play monopoly all night.

They parked Emma's Lotus Elan in the courtyard outside the Dragon. It was still drizzling slightly, so Steed took the correct precautions against the elements, he popped inside and bought half a dozen sandwiches and a bottle of brandy. It might be a long night. Then they trudged up the hill looking for a suitable spot to climb over the high wall.

Steed found a dark bend in the road. He waited for a car to pass, and then he hooked his umbrella on to the top of the wall. He hauled himself up the twelve feet and then leaned down to pull Emma up after him. The casual, lounging-around cat suit she had been wearing at home was more suitable for this jaunt than his own elegant town suit.

"By the way," Emma said when she was standing beside him, "how do you feel about zombies?"

"I don't believe in them." It was hideously still among the graves, and there were no lights anywhere. "Not normally." The trees creaked and the bushes rustled. A little more moonlight would have been useful. And Steed hadn't realised how noisy the rain was.

It was a large, rambling place, overgrown with weeds and ivy, the tombs cracked, broken and neglected. The silhouettes of broken columns were just visible against the sky, and towards the centre were the outlines of crazy gothic memorials too elaborate to be serious. They found progress slow because the ground was so hard and their footsteps echoed through the maze of paths. They had to walk on the muddy verge up the slopes to that fantastic circular terrace of catacombs.

Emma knew they were passing the graves of several thousand people, famous people like Herbert Spencer and Friese-Greene, forgotten people like Tom Sayers, and unknown people, all those ever-loving memories and souls who have found peace, names, names, names, evocative, and without meaning. Who was

little Jennie Whitmore and why did she die when she was only three years old? Did anybody care? Perhaps old Arthur Wilson had drunk himself to death at the age of ninety-three. Had he been happy? By the time they had reached the Egyptian pillars at the entrance to the catacombs Emma felt that a lot of their living had been a waste of time. Who were any of those people? Every one a story, and every death a catastrophe?

"This is the most Godless place in England," she whispered.

"What I always say is," Steed murmured fatuously, "that if you're still alive you haven't much to complain about."

"I wish you wouldn't."

They tiptoed through the passage, glancing nervously from side to side at the doors hanging from their hinges and the vaults blocked up with corrugated iron. A few of them were in perfect repair, and for some reason these were even more alarming. Who, a century later, was polishing the stonework? As they crept below the arch, and the catacombs spread out on either side of them her imagination was working at full speed. She could hear movements. If every one of those concrete cells housed a zombie how could they escape? What do zombies do when they catch you? When they came to the grass covered slopes she fled up them in a state of panic.

"We'll camp down here on the bridge," Steed breathed. He took her arm and led her along to the flat plateau from which they could see nearly everything - except that it was dark. The catacombs were directly below them, and behind was the looming shadow of the columbarium. A clock up in Highgate, perhaps St. Michael's church, struck a sombre eleven o'clock.

"Have some brandy, it'll warm you up," he whispered.

They waited for an hour before anything happened. Emma watched the shadows flit about and constructed weird creatures out of the shapes in the bushes. She heard an owl hoot from time to time and wondered whether that was right; are there owls in April? But the brandy warmed her up. After a while she relaxed, and her common sense told her that if anybody was prowling round the cemetery he would only be a tramp, or someone more scared of them than they were of him. She had to restrain from whistling in the dark. And then she realised it had stopped raining. It must have stopped a long time ago.

She wondered what was going on in Steed's mind. Thick, insensitive male. The only time he ever got nervous was when somebody nearly scratched his old Bentley. What warm and responsive person ever drove around London in a damned great 1929 convertible tractor?

"It's stopped raining," she whispered.

"It stopped half an hour ago. There's the moon over there, riding through all

those racing clouds. Very effective. Look over there, at the strange shadows it makes at the bottom of the hill. You should have brought your sketching pad."

He was the sort of moron who calmly adjusts his beard on the execution block so as not to damage it when they chop his head off. "What kind of sandwiches did you get?"

"Salmon. Tinned, I'm afraid, but we didn't anticipate this picnic very well. Try one, and if it's too unbearable we'll feed them to the vultures."

"I'm hungry."

Suddenly they were on their feet and edging towards the columbarium. Somebody had laughed over there. Steed took her hand and moved rapidly round the platform, almost into a dark figure running noisily up the steps. Somebody else had heard the joke. Steed fell on to a tombstone and pulled Emma on to him. They waited, hidden by the headstone, while three more people came up the steps and went off towards the laughter.

It was only a courting couple making love, and they were captured with the minimum of fuss. The girl screamed briefly, and the man put up a desultory struggle, and then it was over. Emma watched the couple being dragged past them, down the steps and off towards the eastern wall of the cemetery.

"Don't bother with them," Steed muttered. "They'll be back."

He led Emma down into the catacombs and they went stealthily round in a semi-circle until they were underneath the columbarium. There was no sign of a hiding place, no lights behind the doors nor open graves. They had to hang around until the four men returned.

"What," Emma asked eventually, "are they doing to that couple?"

"Ssh!"

The four men were coming back, walking noisily but not talking. There was something distinctly odd about their posture, something unrelaxed, and a chill ran down Emma's spine. She could understand why the chimpanzee had gone berserk. They were dead men.

She felt Steed press her elbow, urging her to stay back in the doorway as they passed, and then he moved out by himself to follow them. He caught them up as they swung back the entrance to a grotesque mausoleum beside an elm tree.

"Excuse me," said Steed, "can you tell me how to get out of this place?"

The reaction was slow to come. The four faces turned and stared at him with vacant disbelief. It seemed to be minutes later when they spread out to form a ring round him.

"It's a simple question -"

Suddenly they were galvanised into action. They closed in, knocked Steed to the muddy ground and then dragged him into the mausoleum. Emma waited

until the sliding stone entrance was back in position before she moved.

Steed found himself in a cold, damp-smelling room about eight feet square and eight feet high. It had rough stone walls and the only source of light was a guttering candle on the floor. He guessed from the flicker of the flame that the air was extremely poor in here. But there was nothing he could do about the situation. His hands were tied behind his back and a foul-tasting handkerchief was stuffed in his mouth.

In one corner were a couple of rotting coffins and in another was a miniature, single kilowatt radio. One of the men was grunting into the grill-microphone. "We took him prisoner, doctor, because he saw us come into the tomb. He is the man who was with the police when they opened up Frank Hammond's grave...." A flat voice without interest or inflexion. Like the man who was guarding Steed, just sitting there, staring at him, not blinking, not seeing or caring, but pointing a gun at his stomach. The other two men had no particular job to do so they were sitting against the wall. Doing nothing. Just sitting against the wall.

"The doctor will come tomorrow," droned the one who had spoken over the radio transmitter. "We shall keep you here." He turned to the guard. "The doctor said put him in one of the coffins, but I do not think he meant us to kill him first."

The two men laid cold zombie hands on Steed and pushed him towards the corner, tripped him so that he fell heavily on to one of the rotten coffins. Steed struggled among a scattered mess of bones while they tied his feet. Then they left him among the pelvis and ribs of a long-forgotten husband. The zombies sat against the wall, staring, doing nothing.

After what seemed like hours of vacuous contemplation, while Steed tried uninspiredly to imagine what these four corpses were doing in the mausoleum, his senses became alert. There had been a movement outside.

The zombies had heard it as well. Someone was scratching at the sliding entrance stone. Again they were terribly slow to react, and for an uncomprehending minute they watched.

"Someone knows where we are." Steed had never heard voices so lacking in character.

Suddenly the slab swung open. The zombies, without any change of expression or sign of alarm, waited at the side of the entrance. Patiently. But nobody came in. And eventually the tallest of them poked his head out.

"Urrgh!" he grunted, and he fell back into the cell with blood pouring from the base of his neck. He remained, bleeding, on the floor.

The one with the gun leaned low against the side of the aperture, pointing the barrel up to the place where Emma had struck from, and he swayed slowly out,

gun first.

He screamed, almost human as both the gun and his fist plopped on to the floor. He carried on screaming as Emma leaped into the room and thrust the sword-point of Steed's umbrella into the third zombie's throat.

She was screaming and shouting as well in the most blood-curdling way. With a whoop of terror she rushed at the last remaining man, swinging the umbrella like the fourth musketeer.

"I kill him!" shouted the last zombie. And by God he seemed likely to. Steed looked up into the gleam of a knife blade poised over his heart. Steady, Mrs. Peel, the better part of valour and all that.

While the tableau remained frozen, with Emma threatening number four and number four threatening Steed, the man with a hand lopped off threshed about in agony, hitting the wall, moaning and jerking. Somehow, by accident or duty, he closed the entrance before losing consciousness through loss of blood.

"You are now a prisoner, madam," grated number four. He stood up and threw his knife at Emma's chest. Which was a mistake. She ducked diagonally and with a reflex flick of the umbrella put out the candle. Steed couldn't see what was happening, but it sounded as if most of it was happening to the fourth zombie. The cries were too guttural to be Emma. And then there was silence. The fact that they were prisoners had been no safeguard.

"I'm sorry, Steed, I got carried away," he heard Emma say at last. "They're all dead. I was terrified that one of them might touch me."

The last remnant of the candle was lit again, and Steed sat up to examine the corpse-scattered, bloody room. He tried to smile. But he withheld the real congratulations until he had tried the door.

"I'm glad you brought your umbrella after all," she said as she undid the ropes and gag. "The zombies left it in the pathway." She helped him to his feet, then they stepped over the bodies and tapped, pressed, pulled, and pushed at the exit.

They were trapped.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"We're prisoners," said Emma.

"Seemingly," said Steed. "What a pity we left the brandy and the sandwiches on the bridge." He grinned at her pale face. She was still panting from the nervous effort. "That was a pretty good massacre, Mrs. Peel. You can join my gang, even though you're a girl. The days of Violet Elizabeth Bott are over."

"I think," she said deprecatingly, "that zombies must be very delicate. I mean, they fell down like jelly...."

Steed frowned as he walked across the room and sat before the tiny radio transmitter. "I know we're in a spot at the moment, Mrs. Peel, but that's no excuse for a mixed metaphor." He wondered whether the radio would be marked with its wavelength, but of course it wasn't. "Do you understand these gadgets?" he asked her.

"No. That's a man's job."

"We can't send for a man, my dear, because there's no phone. I shall have to do it myself." He pressed the signal button three times until a voice said hello. "Is that the doctor?" Steed grated.

"Yes." Suspicious tone, but not identifiable. "Well?"

"All is discovered," said Steed. "Leave the country immediately and follow escape plan number three. This is X minus Y signing off. I shall not be in touch again." He flicked up the switch and beamed at Emma. "Perhaps we ought to have closed with the national anthem."

"I don't know why you're so damned cheerful. This is the nastiest, creepiest place to die that I can imagine. We might be buried alive with these four zombies rotting before our eyes. Why couldn't we be stranded on a Pacific island or marooned on the top of the Alps - somewhere exotic. This is such a squalid place!"

Steed had unscrewed the back of the radio and was scrutinising the wavelength adjuster. But he looked up briefly and shook his head. "It all depends who you're with. I'd have thought that made all the difference." He had changed the wavelength now so any hope of tracing 'the doctor' was gone. It was more necessary to get the wavelength he wanted. He fiddled for nearly half an hour, adjusting and tightening and guessing. If only he'd learnt about fuses and sparking plugs and making a fire with two matches when he was young, he could have changed the wavelength with a nail file more easily. "Sorry to be so

long about this," he said breezily to Emma, "but these single kilowatt transmitters are awkward things -"

"Fraud."

He nursed his ego, growing more anti-feminist by the minute as he tried to reach Thorburn and failed. Emma was watching him with that smug, womanly expression. And why was the stump of the dead man's arm still oozing blood? "I'm not a technician," he announced loftily. "I'm a planner, and if necessary a man of action, and I usually pay people to know the difference between a big end and a crankshaft."

"Huh. The big end is the big end of the crankshaft."

"Ssh. Listen."

It was Thorburn's voice saying hello, hello, this is the lower depths.

"You see," said Steed, "it's just a question of common sense."

"Huh."

Thorburn sounded dissolute and drunk at the other end. Steed was only grateful that he couldn't see him, because he invariably looked as if he had three months to live. Looking at Thorburn was like looking at a metaphor of the human condition, romantic, young, ill and doomed. The human body had betrayed the wonders of science and a weak soul had proved incurable. What a shame the fellow would look just as disreputable for another fifty years.

"Where the hell are you, Steed? I've had you listed as missing for two hours."

"What about forgetting your record books," Steed drawled, "and getting over here to help? I'm in Highgate mausoleum..."

Ho ho ho. Thorburn had been to Eton, and his sense of humour had been developed by watching kids injured during the wall game. There was only one thing funnier and that was a flogging.

"I want the whole riot squad," said Steed, "to converge on Sir James Oxbury's mausoleum within half an hour." He snapped off the switch before Thorburn could explain why half an hour was impossible.

"He's just a glorified white collar worker," said Steed.

Emma was staring down at one of the corpses. "Do these things smell to you?" she asked thoughtfully. "I think they are disintegrating under our noses. Perhaps by morning they'll be rotting bodies in the same state of decay as they would have been if the process had started when they died months ago. Just four skeletons...."

"My dear Mrs. Peel!" Strong words were called for. "These are decent British zombies, they aren't mystic Russian monks. Don't let Dostoievsky ruin your life!"

The word went round north London at half past five, and ten minutes later the

first shambling figure stumbled up to the cemetery gates. He was joined almost immediately by a scarecrow of a woman, and soon there were nearly a dozen. It was a long trek from the East End so the next group would probably arrive when it was all over. This was Thorburn's riot squad, lured by the promise of methylated spirits and a few shillings pocket money.

They stood around in the cold morning air, stamping their soggy boots and adjusting the newspapers inside their clothes. Blowing foul breath on trembling hands. Talking occasionally but never listening. And then with the same disorganised impulse that had brought them to Highgate, one hauled himself over the iron railings and the rest followed.

They struggled slowly up the hill leaving a very sick old man grovelling on the stone path where he fell. Nobody tried to help him. They continued up to an arbitrary clearing, short of breath, belching and breaking wind, and then they sat around apathetically watching while the coldest one tried to light a fire.

They were undisciplined people and twice a brief fight broke out between them, first when someone produced a threepenny bit and then when the man who had stolen it fell asleep - the original owner hit him on the side of the head with a chunk of concrete. But the rest didn't pay much attention. One sang moaningly to himself, one was sucking at a tin of metal polish, another was describing the way a policeman had thrown him into the river before arresting him. They all hovered uncertainly between nightmarish sleep and glazed wakefulness. The most strenuous activity was devoted to picking at their tattered boots.

Thorburn arrived when the fire was alight. His teeth weren't brown stubs as the others were, but he was just as dirty and his baggy clothes were tenth hand and twenty years old. They all clustered round him, snatching the bottles of blue meths and drinking it until, reassured, they staggered back to the fire. There they remained, relieving themselves where they lay, passing out and coming round in time for the next drink.

Thorburn wasn't an alcoholic, he was a Christian. He spent all the time he could with the meths men, talking to them when they were prepared to hear and studying them as a social phenomenon. He regarded them as colourful and saw himself as a modern Mayhew. Steed didn't like him very much, and he denounced what he called the George Orwell syndrome, but Thorburn had undoubtedly turned his socialising to good use. He kept watch on places and moved in on people most effectively. The trouble with Steed was that he couldn't bear fleas.

"Do you see those three men coming up the hill?" said Thorburn some time later.

Nobody took any notice.

Thorburn took a hearing aid from the folds of his overcoat and fiddled with the tuning device. "Those three men will try to throw us out of here." A pause, and then he heard Steed's languid voice assuring him of a medal, old sweetheart.

He collected the meths bottles and backed away to the burial tomb of Sir John Oxbury. His rabble army followed to protect the bottles. Then they shuffled about until the newcomers arrived and the two sides stared at each other.

"Would you please go away?"

"Spare a shilling, squire?" wheedled the mugger automatically.

"Give us a fag, squire."

The well-dressed leader backed away from their breath in disgust, but they were holding on to his sleeve. He struggled, and then took his change from his pocket and threw it down the path, which was clever because the meths men grovelled after it. Thorburn had to grab the leader and hurl him at the blue meths bottles to regain their attention. That succeeded in starting the riot.

Two minutes later Thorburn had the leader on the ground by the mausoleum and he was fighting off the meths men. They had kicked and clubbed the other two men and robbed their prostrate bodies of boots, coats and money, and now they were fighting each other for the loot. One of them staggered back into the fire and stayed there watching his coat burn.

"Open the tomb!" hissed Thorburn.

"No."

"They'll tear you to pieces."

"Let me go."

Thorburn guessed from the man's eyes the approximate location of the door, so he dragged him to it and held his feet while the meths men set about his pockets. The man struggled, and screamed, and offered a thousand pounds reward. But before he was naked and scratched to death he had pressed the panel. Steed and Emma were free.

"Thanks very much," said Steed with less than gratitude. "I never did like those pharaohs preserved in tombs. Mrs. Peel and I have decided to be cremated." He was half-way down the path when Thorburn called after him.

"What about all this mess?" he called. "There are bodies...."

"Run a check on them," shouted Steed. "I want to know where they all worked. And have that ring-leader fellow delivered to my flat in Westminster Mews."

They vanished into the early morning mists of Highgate.

CHAPTER NINE

The result of one night's work had been six corpses and a badly burned meths man. The legends grew and became a national talking point, crowds visited the cemetery and reporters tried unsuccessfully to interview the derelict band that Thorburn had left to sit around drinking in Oxbury's tomb. It had, Steed admitted, got out of hand. They had not been tidy.

"I didn't really kill those zombies," said Emma defiantly, "because they had already died." It was a fine distinction, but she needed to convince herself that she hadn't succumbed to a psychopathic fit of panic.

"My dear, you worry too much. You panicked slightly, as did that chimpanzee. Perfectly natural."

It wasn't the right thing to say. Steed sighed, poured her a Napoleon brandy ('48) and wondered how to restore her nerve. She wasn't normally a sensitive plant, but the dead gaolers had worried her, and the final invasion of the tomb by a stinking, cadaverous rabble of meths drinkers had produced a state of high suppressed hysteria. Understandable, of course, but a temporary reaction, surely. Yet even now she was knocking back the brandy without the slightest appreciation of its perfection.

"I think, Mrs. Peel, that we must plunge you straight back into the battle." It was the best way. When you fall off a horse, straight back on before you have time to decide never again.

"I'm tired."

"What would have happened if Napoleon had tired?"

"He wouldn't have fought the battle of Waterloo and he wouldn't have been defeated."

"The man downstairs will have to be questioned."

"Please, Steed, you question him."

The advantage of living in a mews flat was that it had a large garage on the ground floor which could be used as a dungeon. The mysterious doctor who had turned up with his two zombie bodyguards was down there, chained to the wall by the rings that had fifty years ago been used for tethering the horses. But he wouldn't talk, and Steed was baffled by the problem. Somebody had to question him.

He needed to be tossed around a bit. That was all. Emma could do it with as little thought as most people do deep breathing exercises in the morning.

Thorburn couldn't, because he was a Christian. Steed couldn't, because he was a gentleman. He didn't approve of violence.

"Those zombies are so delicate," Emma explained.

"The man downstairs is not a zombie."

Women are funny things. You don't get the same emotional reactions at Eton or Sandhurst or in M.I. 5. Well, not often. Men are more simple and uncomplicated. When a man is cheerful he's happy and when he's depressed he needs a drink. None of this sensitive stuff.

"The extraordinary thing," said Steed, "is that these zombies are really zombies. Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"Extremely," said Emma. "That's my point."

"Eh? Oh yes, religion and witchcraft and all that. But we're sensible people, we don't believe in dead souls conjured up by magic, do we?" He laughed uncertainly. He thought perhaps Emma did, in her present mood. "We know there has to be a rational explanation. After all, when you die you die and that's that. So what is the rational explanation?"

"There isn't one."

Yes, he'd been afraid of that.

"The rational line of argument," he said heavily, "points directly to the Department of Scientific Research. Because they are working on the pathology of death. They go in for all this heart massage and kiss of life and so on. They must tie in. The late Frank Hammond provides the link."

"Yes," said Emma. "I expect you're right."

It was one o'clock in the afternoon. Steed ran a hot bath for her, put clean sheets on the bed and handed her his softest camel fleece dressing gown. "Mrs. Peel," he said paternally, "I'll wake you at nine. By that time I hope to have news for you." He pushed her towards the bathroom and left her to forget her problems in the luxury of sleep.

Steed listened to the third movement of the Eroica while he nibbled a cold leg of chicken, drank a glass of champagne and lit a panatella. Then he went down into the garage. The man had to be dealt with.

The man was frightened. He had masqueraded as a reporter and killed Jacob Burns, he had mixed casually with a gang of dead men, but he was not blase. He was sullen.

Steed made certain all the doors and windows were closed, then climbed into his Bentley and started the engine. It started first time, of course, and when the engine was ticking over nicely he climbed out and went over to the prisoner.

"Carbon monoxide," he explained. "It's a painless way to die. A lot of people commit suicide this way. I'm not going to torture you or resort to any of those

vulgarity. I'll leave you to choose between dying and talking."

"I'm not talking."

"Fair enough."

Steed went back upstairs and listened to the fourth movement of the Eroica. He finished the leg of chicken, had another glass of champagne, and relaxed for a couple of hours. He didn't like scientific journals very much, but they passed the time more usefully than old volumes of *Punch* because they contained accounts of Russian and American work on bringing dead people back to life.

Especially relevant was an account of Professor Lev Landau, winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics, who had been killed in a car smash and sustained fatal injuries to his skull, ribs, lungs and pelvis, who had been pronounced clinically dead four times, and who had been slowly nursed back to health. Then there were accounts of American hospitals replacing damaged hearts and livers to bring people back to life. But one thing these cases all had in common was speed - nobody had been dead for more than a few minutes. No time for rigor mortis or decay.

At four o'clock there was a telephone call from Thorburn. Five of the dead men had previously worked with the Department of Scientific Research. The sixth was an American serviceman called Schlesinger. "We can't find out any more without going through all their security channels," explained Thorburn, "so we've returned the body and asked for a full report."

These Americans get everywhere. "I expect they caught him desecrating Karl Marx's tomb," said Steed. "All right, on with the work."

Steed went back downstairs and opened the doors and windows. The man was unconscious but still breathing slightly. It was difficult to believe how deadly the gas was, it had no smell, and it came from the exhaust of that comfy old car. But it was deadly. Steed quickly dumped the man in the back of the Bentley and drove out of the garage.

It took him twenty minutes to reach the rear entrance to the Department of Scientific Research. The object now was to make everyone in the building know what was happening.

"Have this man taken to your operating theatre," Steed ordered the doorman. "Quick, because he's dying!" And before the doorman could argue Steed strode past him down the long corridor. He found the typing pool at the end on the left. He went in.

"What is Dr. Manden's number?" he demanded as he picked up the intercom on the first desk. "Excuse me."

Twelve typists looked at him aghast. "Dr. Manden? Oh. Twenty-three."

Steed beamed at them all. "Manden? This is John Steed, you remember, we

had a chat several days ago about death.... Yes, I've brought in a dead man who needs your attention.... I never joke, sir. He's one of your henchmen so I've had him put in your laboratory."

Another radiant smile at the twelve girls and he went out. Two porters were carrying the unconscious man into the lift so Steed followed.

"He does work here, doesn't he?" Steed said amiably.

"Not now," said the Jamican with an Oxford accent, "he left about six months ago... suh."

"What's his name?"

"Dr. Sears."

"Fancy."

Dr. Manden didn't waste time on formal chatter. He sent for two nurses and the oxygen apparatus. While these were coming he applied artificial respiration. Steed hung about, broadening his mind. He had never seen a top surgeon operating before. He wondered whether they would do the scalpel/scalpel, forceps/forceps, needle and cotton routine, but they didn't. It was just a question of filling his lungs with pure air, making sure that the brain wasn't damaged and standing by to see whether a blood transfusion was necessary.

When the man, Dr. Sears, was pronounced out of danger an ambulance was sent for and he was transferred to hospital.

"Now, Mr. Steed, I require an explanation." They were sitting in Dr. Manden's office, and the man's tone was distant with distaste. "What has this all been about?"

"I found him downstairs in my garage, and unfortunately I'd left the car running - "

"Why didn't you call an ambulance?"

"I thought it would be quicker. My car was running, so I popped him in the back and rattled over here. He did work for you, didn't he?"

"He had been a research doctor, but he and I clashed on a few subjects, and so he resigned." The dapper doctor stroked his tiny beard. "He belonged to the old regime, if you understand."

Steed chuckled. "I understand perfectly. The work goes on, but the personnel has to change when the mogul changes. I gather that most of Feuer's men are now dead or retired."

Dr. Sir Richard Manden looked bored. He shook his head slowly and then rose to his feet. "I believe that question was gone into some weeks ago. The department was exonerated...."

"You mean there was no evidence at that time to demonstrate either what was wrong or why it was wrong. We have enough evidence now to close down this

entire place."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Steed, I'm extremely busy."

"There are zombies wandering about London at this moment who come from here. I wouldn't be surprised if all those late members of Dr. Feuer's staff haven't been resuscitated and are at this moment playing cards in a basement somewhere. And you're extremely busy? I'm absolutely astounded. Good afternoon to you, sir."

The lift was empty as he went down but when he reached the corridor on the ground floor, Steed found that he had company. Large ex-boxer types, who took an arm each and whisked him into the gents' cloakroom. Then something slammed against the back of his neck and a sickly darkness wrapped itself round Steed as he fell.

Steed didn't see the trolley with a man covered by white sheeting wheeled from the cloakroom a few minutes later, and he didn't see them put the unconscious man in an ambulance and drive away. Because he was the unconscious man.

CHAPTER TEN

George Washington had been with the Department of Scientific Research for six weeks and he was bored. A degree in law at Oxford University to sweep up a laboratory? Man, you can sweep your own floors, and drive your own buses, carry your own cases. I shall be back in ten years and I'll come back as Prime Minister of Jamaica. Meanwhile don't call me Zulu. The name is George Washington.

He drove a massive red Jaguar, because that annoyed all the poor whites, especially when he had Cynthia Orme-Whitbread with him. But it was inconvenient for pursuing ambulances at speed through Hendon in the rush hour. Conspicuous as well. George Washington laughed at two girls trying to thumb a lift up north. These damned girls!

He had only taken this job with Major General Lawrence's security outfit because it would be great experience when he became Prime Minister. And then they had put him into that place where he'd had to sweep floors! Listen, boy, I don't mind being shot at and I'll put up with being thrown into gaol, but sweeping floors is for damned Nigerians.

The ambulance was turning left and heading towards Watford. Hendon, Watford, Neasden, Kilburn, no wonder the English go and colonise places like Jamaica. Edgware, Stanmore. Man! Then they went through a place called Radlett, which was used in all those B feature films, crowded with stockbrokers and private schools. Not many cars on the road, though, and the ambulance was driving faster. They must have noticed the red Jaguar. Well, that's what red Jaguars are for.

The narrow country road twisted blindly round fields and past neat little hedges, and as night fell rapidly George Washington found it more and more difficult to keep up without full headlamps. He was hitting grass verges and bouncing with well sprung springs across the dips and crevices of the surface. I mean steady, this goddam car set me back two thousand!

He toyed with the idea of just rescuing de boss suh, but obviously it was more important to follow them to their destination. De boss suh would have to sweat it out. The British Empire wasn't what it was, and yes suh Mr. Steed would have to sweat until the black boy was good and ready. George Washington laughed out loud. You don't like the British upper classes? man, you should see the people running Jamaica now. Until I get back. George Washington, you talk

too much!

Mr. Steed was the finest under-cover man in the country, a-yup, but he never swept a laboratory floor yet. Jesus, where in the name of the British Raj was that ambulance? Man, I'm a lawyer, not a race driver. Then he saw it. George Washington slammed on his brakes as the white ambulance loomed out of the darkness at him. They had unloaded themselves on to the grass verge and left the ambulance across the road for him to hit. His four tyres screamed and half a ton of machinery skidded across to the steep bank on the other side of the road. It was like hitting a wall, sideways; and just as the Jaguar seemed likely to roll over George Washington opened out the throttle. He shot forward, past the goddamned ambulance, fought the steering wheel and hauled the car round the next corner. Do you know something? I *am* a race driver. God-damn! He drove on for two hundred yards and then parked in a field. Two thousand English pounds this car had set him back. I mean, steady, man.

George Washington turned off the lights and the ignition and then ran to the tall oak tree by the side of the hedgerow. He climbed up rapidly to the highest safe branch, cursing the dirtiness of trees. He hadn't remembered that trees were such dirty things. Okay, you guys, where is that ambulance? Ah yes, there was that ambulance.

Come to think of it, it was Dr. George Washington. Just in case they found him perched up a tree. Gor blimey, Fred, he's up a bleedin' tree, and I fort them nig-nogs came dahn from trees twenty year ago. Thing is, Bert, it takes 'em a few centuries of this 'ere civilisation to be like us. Yeah, man. Just remember that, it's *Doctor* George Washington.

The ambulance drove past slowly, went on about four hundred yards, and then turned round and came back. It went into a gate just down the road. Large place, that looked like a lunatic asylum or a home for disabled soldiers.

George Washington came down from his tree and went along the road. He could do one of two things; go back to Hampstead and report to the Iceberg, or prowl around for an hour, just to show that Jamaica can produce its own Ian Flemings. The Iceberg idea had its appeal, because he had heard so much about that English flower, and he fancied testing out a theory he had about being irresistible to white women. Mrs. Peel had a reputation for being pretty resistant.

They were taking de boss suh out of the ambulance, and as far as he could see from the shadowy movements Steed was conscious but strapped down on the stretcher. They took him into the dark house, a couple of lights went on on the ground floor, and then a few minutes later one of the men came back out and drove off in the ambulance. Then nothing for half an hour.

George Washington climbed over the eight foot wall and started making his

way across the vast lawn. He was totally exposed, but there was no cover of any kind. And no fierce dogs, trip wires or guards on the roof with searchlights and sub-machine guns. It was all very improbable. He reached the house, loose limbed and ready on the reflexes to hit or run. But nothing. Man, this is unbelievable. He touched the drainpipe on the east wing. It wasn't electrified. I mean, this is sinister. He climbed up to the balcony on the first floor, peered in at the window and found the room empty. So he crouched on the balcony and tinkered with the catch. No burglar alarm. No sudden flood of lights from the lawn with a policeman in front of the crowd yelling, 'Come down, boy, you don't stand a chance.'

He slipped into the room and across to the door. That was when all the lights went on.

Sinister. George Washington tried to open the door, but it was locked. And then he heard voices coming along the passage. He backed away to the window. This time it was different. When he touched the catch an electric shock nearly kicked his arm off. God-damn!

"Darling, he may be black but he isn't a savage. Just be nice to him."

"What is this, a weekend party then?"

They'd stopped outside the door and someone was unlocking it. "No, but George Washington may contribute a little more to a civilised weekend than you."

I mean, dig these crazy women. She opened the door and smiled her hostess's smile. "It would have been so much simpler to ring the doorbell, Mr. Washington. In fact, you could have cadged a lift in Sydney's ambulance. But welcome." She extended a hand for him to shake. Crazy.

"Well, I got here in the end," he drawled. "Hello."

"I'm Margaret Windsor. No relation, I'm afraid." One of those crazy old things of forty odd, very tall and gold lame with a voice like ice being rattled in a whisky glass, brittle and mocking. Oh yeah, with the long cigarette holder bit. "I do hope you weren't busy this weekend?"

"Nothing that won't wait." These damned white girls! "What's the scene then?"

"I'm sure we'll think of something to pass the time." She flashed the hostess smile again and took George Washington by the arm. "The little man with the gun is Len. Say good evening, Len."

"Good evening," said Len.

"Len forgets his manners sometimes. But don't take offence. Just ignore him."

George Washington glanced at the gun and laughed. "I got a thick skin, Mrs. Windsor."

They went downstairs like the perfect couple entering an end-of-the-season ball. But downstairs instead of bewigged flunkies and a fashionable cross section of Regency society there were half a dozen men in white coats and a couple of janitors. And then George Washington stopped. Jesus! I'm getting out, man!

"Come along, Mr. Washington, we've so much to show you. That's your friend Mr. Steed over there, fast asleep, poor thing. And this is the infra-red scanner. We watched you climb over the wall on this screen here. Really, what *is* the matter?"

"Sorry, ma'am, but I have to be going!"

He kicked the gun out of Len's hand with a swift flick of the leg, then he was out of the door and up the stairs before anyone could react. Come on, George Washington. There was a man half-way down the stairs and he hit the bottom before he knew what was happening. Cassius Clay isn't the only coloured man in the world.

"Mr. Washington, come back. I wanted you to work with us. You'll never get away!"

"Sorry, Mrs. Windsor, but I'm in a hurry. You'll have to sweep out your own god-damned laboratory!"

He reached the top floor in fifteen seconds, stopped himself just in time from touching the electrified catch and instead smashed the window with a chair. Then he was out. He jumped at a drainpipe too far away, slithered down almost out of control and fell the last ten feet. Someone was shooting at him. Man, you can't shoot the natives on British soil! Where do you think you are? Jesus! Who said the Negroes weren't the finest high wall jumpers in the world?

God-damn! Are you an ignorant coloured boy or have you a degree in law at Oxford University? Don't argue with me, man, I saw it I tell you!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Emma Peel woke up at ten o'clock feeling entirely recovered. Ready for a hard night's work, except that Steed was nowhere about. There was no note from him and no sign of his having been here within several hours. The coffee pot was cold and the coal fire was dead. So she made some coffee and relit the fire. She dressed to the rather classical taste in music that Steed had acquired : an L.P. of Monteverdi in stereo. It was really worrying. When Steed said he'd wake her at nine he meant just that. But he hadn't even telephoned. He was in trouble.

The Bentley was downstairs in the street, so he had been out. And the prisoner was gone, so Steed had taken him somewhere. She went back into the bathroom and rowed for a few minutes, while she thought about it. Poor old Steed, he tried hard to keep fit. It was quite exhausting.

Then she heard the telephone ring, so she spent several minutes looking for that. Steed objected to the damn thing, so he was ex-directory and he kept it hidden in a cupboard. Eventually she found it and some clown calling himself George Washington asked whether that was Mrs. Peel.

"No, this is Lady Godiva."

"Stay where you are. I'll be right over." And he hung up. Extraordinary man. Perhaps he expected to find her naked on a horse. Emma sighed and went back to finish her coffee.

George Washington arrived in his red Jaguar and burst into the flat as if he were pursued by demons. He shook her by the hand and smiled with devastating charm when he remembered, and then he continued to explain that he wasn't just a superstitious nigger, whatever she might think. "Doctor George Washington, if you don't mind." But he claimed to have seen it with his own eyes, God-damn. "I mean, you won't believe it!"

"Never mind," said Emma. "Tell me about it later. Would you like a drink?" He was still talking about a degree at Oxford and being the Prime Minister of Jamaica, so she poured him a stiff brandy and then watched him drink it. He was very beautiful, she reflected, like those Hollywood Negroes who look like handsome white boys with a chocolate complexion. But he was terribly agitated, which detracted from his natural grace.

"I spent nearly two years in Jamaica," said Emma, "when I was a girl. My father ran a shipping line, and when there was talk of making bauxite into the great Jamaican export he bought a few mining concessions. It's the most

beautiful country." She smiled nostalgically. "Do you know, my girlhood hero was Marcus Moziah Garvey, because he started a Negro shipping company, I suppose, and they'd put up that bust of him in the King George Memorial Park. Is it all changed now? I've always avoided going back in case it was crowded with tourists who see the world as a succession of views from the Hilton hotels."

George Washington was looking at her more sympathetically, but he was still too frightened to establish that kind of rapport. "Perhaps I'm just a chocolate coloured coon - superstitious and scared of the dark!"

"Nonsense! Something seems to have frightened you tonight, but I expect it would have frightened you if you were yellow or purple." She was growing nervous herself. Had he seen Steed turned into a zombie or something? "How do you come to be involved in this?" she asked, hoping he would know what "this" referred to.

"My father is chief of police in Kingston." He had made an enormous effort to be suave and social. "When I had qualified in law we decided that I should do some under-cover work in England." He poured himself another brandy without asking. "But I didn't expect to go into the suburbs of London and find what I could find in the mountains at home."

Now, here we were again. "What did you find?" she asked patiently.

"Mrs. Peel, in the mountains at home you can see many things, because they are inhabited by people who believe in spirits and magic. You wouldn't understand, but because those people believe so fervently in their witchcraft it enables them to actually work their magic. They whip themselves up into a state of ecstasy with their drumming and dancing, and when that happens they can kill a man's spirit by curses or recall a man from the dead with an incantation just as they cure sickness and make women fertile. You see, they all believe in it; when they put a curse on a man he becomes so scared he dies of fright. I think I'd die of fright as well. Once you've seen a couple of those ceremonies you'll never believe in atheism again. It's a terrifying sight. Just the sound of the drums is enough to make you sweat."

"I know," said Emma. "And what did you see in this country?"

"Just that, man, that's what I saw."

"Voodoo?"

"God-damn, I knew three of those cats who were working in there. I saw them die a few weeks ago!"

Emma laughed. "I know exactly how you feel. A woman is also superstitious and scared of the dark. You need a warm bath and eight hours sleep. But there has to be a rational explanation for all this, because we don't really believe in voodoo and zombies do we, not in London suburbs? And the rational

explanation points to the Department of Scientific Research. Right? So what happened there this afternoon?"

George Washington rubbed his knees and said something about cool women, man. Then he told her what had happened that afternoon. Emma found it pleasing to hear Steed referred to as *de boss suh*, it put the old empire builder in his place, and accounted for the ruthless glint in his eyes. But she wished they could get to the point about whether he was alive or dead.

"He was in a cage," said George Washington.

"There were chimpanzees and some other animals and him in cages at the end of the laboratory."

"I trust they were treating him humanely?" said Emma.

"He was asleep."

"He'll have to stay asleep for a few more hours. We can't simply burst into that place and smash up the equipment. We'll have to find out more about their intentions first. You know, *why* are all those zombies being raised from the dead? I think we must have a word with Dr. Sears."

"But he's in hospital - "

"Then you and I will have to get him out of hospital."

When Steed recovered consciousness he thought he was still in Dr. Sir Richard Manden's laboratory. The layout, the decor, the equipment, were the same. The charts on the wall were tracking the same experiments and no doubt the files contained the same information. There was something missing, though, and eventually Steed realised that it was Professor Feuer's brain.

He looked through the bars at his fellow prisoners in the next cages. They obviously felt as he did, trapped and sorry they hadn't sent their subscription to the R.S.P.C.A. There was another animal, apparently dead, on the operating table. To Steed's lay mind it looked as if some kind of electrical apparatus was working on its heart. Massage, transfusion, an artificial pump? something like that. The four men were working silently, but the woman who had been watching with supreme disinterest turned to wave limply at Steed.

He waved languidly back.

Presently the animal on the operating table began twitching. They gave it oxygen to make it breathe. And then the woman came across to Steed. "That chimpanzee had been dead for a month," she drawled. "We are making progress." She was regal, ravaged and sardonic. "How are you feeling now?"

"Fine, thanks," said Steed. "I'm slightly cold without any clothes and I'd like to stretch my legs. Otherwise, fine thanks."

Her laugh was like an extended death rattle at the back of the throat. "We have to keep our dangerous animals in a cage, Mr. Steed, until we are ready to

use them."

"Would it be impertinent to ask what you mean to use me for?"

"A healthy and vigorous man is always useful to have around, Mr. Steed. As you've probably noticed, these are all sick and half dead, these doctors and miscellaneous helpers that we've acquired to do our work."

"They were alive until you killed them off," said Steed.

"But darling, we had to. We could never have persuaded them to come and work for us without killing them first. These scientists have integrity and things like that."

"So you had to kill them, bring them here and revive them, and then set them to work again on the D.S.R. projects...."

"Isn't science wonderful?" she growled. "But don't worry, darling, you'll be more than just a walking intelligence. We have come to the really big step, and you can help. Did you know that you have a very trim figure?"

"It doesn't show when I'm properly dressed."

"My name is Margaret. I'm sure we'll have enormous fun when you're better."

The bars were made of iron and the lock would need either a crowbar or a key. Four feet square. Steed was beginning to feel that more was required than friendly charm towards his captor. A bang on the head or a hypnotic stare. "You still haven't said what I shall be better from."

"Silly me," she sighed. "I was carried away. Yes, we decided that we could use your head." A chilling giggle detained her for a moment. "The man who led the world in this work for years was Professor Feuer, and of course he died. Left his brain to the Department of Scientific Research. You won't believe it, but his brain is still alive..."

"I saw it," said Steed carefully, "in a bottle of plasma." He could guess the rest of the plot. "The man was telling me that his collection of toys at the D.S.R. was surgically useless because people would die before the organs could be transferred from one body to another." He smiled weakly. Well, that was what he'd said.

Margaret knew about such things. "We could give you Professor Feuer's brain," she said happily, "because you would be dead already. And then afterwards we could revive you. Clever?"

Steed nodded. "Isn't science wonderful?" They led simpler lives in Chaucer's time, whenever that was.

I mean, this redhead is just too much. Come along, George Washington, she says in that English voice, we must fetch that ambulance from the D.S.R. Oh yeah? But you cannot argue with Mrs. Peel any more than you can argue with the Sunday school teacher. Her brown eyes twinkle and she nearly smiles and

she says come along, George Washington. You know, be a man, George Washington, or be British. What can you do with a woman like this, for Christ's sake?

Not me, man, I got a delicate vanity. So we're driving along in this God-damned ambulance and she's sitting next to me as cool as iced champagne and dressed as the most fantastic hospital matron! And I'm usually such a knock-out with white women.

When we drive into the hospital courtyard she starts ringing the bell. As if we were selling ice cream! Come along, George Washington, we're in a hurry. Jesus, do you know what time it is? Somebody might hear us! Then we go running through the main door of the hospital and she starts giving the orders.

"Where is the matron on duty? Quickly, please, this is an emergency. And I need to know which ward Dr. Sears is detained in.."

The aged porter didn't know whether to fetch the matron, ring the alarm or tell her where Dr. Sears was sleeping. But he tried to do all three. "Yes, miss, well, he's in that ward at the end of the corridor, I think, Alexandra ward, and if you'll come with me to the matron's office.... "

"Go along, George Washington, fetch the patient and put him in the ambulance."

She knocks me out! Yes, suh, Mrs. Peel, I said, and I laughed while the porter flapped around her in a complete panic. Then I sloped off to find the missing patient, trying to look like one of those genuine Nigerian hospital orderlies. Unhurried, not interested, you know.

A few of the patients in that ward looked pretty scared when I was searching for Dr. Sears, as if they thought the black man had come to get them. Goddamn, they weren't half as scared as Dr. Sears when I sat him up and laid him out again.

"You don't need the authority, matron, just take this letter and let me sign for him. I'll accept the responsibility." I had to admire that Iceberg nerve. By then the body was in the ambulance and the matron stopped arguing. She just looked at the D.S.R. headed paper that we'd used and shrugged her shoulders.

"I think it's high time you research establishments pulled your socks up," she was saying. "You should have checked him for leprosy before he left your premises."

She really said it, high time you pulled your socks up, and she meant it. I nearly drove the ambulance into a god-damned wall. And that Emma Peel, she smiled slightly as if we'd won the battle of Waterloo.

CHAPTER TWELVE

They arrived back at the Department of Scientific Research at three in the morning. It was a burglarproof building, but they weren't burglars. George Washington had a home-made set of keys, and when they had returned the ambulance they took Dr. Sears up into the laboratory wing. It was easy, but they had to be quick.

"Excuse me, suh miss, but aren't we wasting time while Mr. Steed is in danger?" asked George Washington. "It seems to me that our prisoner will have to be broken down so that he confesses what we already know - where the boss man is."

Emma sighed. "You may be right, Mr. Washington. But once we break into that house and rescue Steed then the game is over. Whoever is behind all this will vanish, and whatever his plan was it will be put into effect next year or the year after. We must take a chance...."

"Okay, miss," he grinned, "what have we got to lose? Mr. Steed's been at the top long enough."

"Don't be silly! Both Mrs. Windsor and Dr. Sears are subordinates. We have to get at the top man if we're going to *help* Steed. Come on, into the lift and stop arguing. Don't let him struggle like that."

George Washington lifted Dr. Sears an inch off the floor and slapped him against the wall of the lift.

"What we should do," Emma said sadly, "is use voodoo on the man. Scare him to death. It would be somehow apposite."

"I'll scare him to death, Mrs. Peel," he answered with disturbing cheerfulness. "My father's chief of police in Kingston."

Emma was quite unabashed about her enjoyment of physical perfection. She enjoyed Cassius Clay when he demonstrated his godlike superiority in speed, strength and beauty at the expense of lumbering oafs; she found it poetic and emotionally gratifying. So she watched George Washington toss the wretched Sears on the floor as if it were an aesthetic exercise. George Washington grinned dazzlingly, stripped the squalid man of his clothes and then hoisted him on to the operating table. But she should, she decided, be concentrating her mind on Sears. They wanted the information from him, after all. She would have to stop watching the Negro moving, smiling, casually humiliating the man.

She watched George Washington take the electrical massage apparatus and

hover with it above his naked flesh. She almost screamed herself as he applied it to Dr. Sears's testicles. The man bucked so violently that he nearly snapped his bonds. She watched George Washington attach the current to the man's breasts, and she was quivering with fear. George Washington was six feet two, broad in the shoulders and narrow in the hips. Twenty-three years old and vivacious....

"I'm going upstairs," she said quickly. "I ought to have been through Dr. Manden's files three days ago."

The Jamaican looked worried, as if he had done something to displease her. "Okay," he said, "but what shall I do?"

"Carry on, George Washington, carry on."

"Hey, boss suh, miss!" he called after her. She went back into the laboratory. "I'm sorry to be dim witted, Mrs. Peel, but what do we want to know from this man?"

Emma flushed angrily. "We want to know why! We want to know who is behind all this!" She stalked out of the room and slammed the door. She could hear Dr. Sears squealing, howling, all the way up the stairs, and this made her tremble all the more. A deep throated laugh made her run the short distance down the corridor and into Dr. Manden's office.

She ought to have examined these papers before. What had Professor Feuer been working on? What kind of man was he, to begin this work with the staff who became zombies so quickly after his death? She could hear a few screams from the floor below, but they were coming from a murderer. Save your regrets for Jacob Burns! Or the dead men whom he persecuted. You'd have thought that a place like this would be sound-proofed.

She struggled with George Washington's keys and eventually unlocked the filing cabinets and the large oak desk. She would have to recommend George Washington for a commendation. He had thought of everything. The sort of under-cover man that England needs. There were diaries, schedules of experiments, the usual transactions with the Treasury and estimates for money.... Reports on progress. It was all very normal. A personnel file. A file on Dr. Feuer compiled by Manden.

It seemed that Manden had been appointed before the great man had died.

"Dr. Feuer is working like a man obsessed. He has been given six months to live, and instead of this reducing him to apathy as is normal in my experience it has made him obsessed with his work. This is the sign of greatness, it puts work before human frailty, knowledge before self. Just as Beethoven put his music before all. But I am frightened by the professor. I think he is mad.

"I found a flaw in the accounts the week after I arrived. Twenty-five thousand pounds had vanished. But I could never prove it. The accounts are so chaotic,

and by the time we come to audit the year's expenditure Professor Feuer will be dead. So there will be no answer. It might have been a gorilla he bought, or a house, a second set of equipment.... And he will be a great scientist who should have won the Nobel Prize for Physics. We shall have to leave it to the accountants, and when people ask questions I shall have to say, these are *my* accounts, and this is *my* work. I am not responsible for anything that happened.... And the subject will be dropped. It is better that the subject be dropped. Dr. Feuer is a great man, and only the matter of being given six months to live has unsettled him.

"I am proud to be following in his footsteps...."

All that was written by Dr. Sir Richard Manden. Six months ago. Emma put the file back in his bottom drawer. After all, the poor bugger had *died* six months after the doctors had given him six months to live.

And it was only after Professor Feuer had died that Manden had found out what his obsessional work had really been. But that wasn't in the report.

Emma turned out the lights and silently put back the papers. She had heard someone moving out in the corridor. She closed the drawers and moved rapidly across the room. Whoever it was, he clearly had no knowledge of the Department's layout. She heard him go into the lavatory, the storage cupboard by the lift, and then as she opened the door he ran off down the stairs.

Emma reached the banisters in time to see a large shadow spiralling down below, a fairly big man almost running down the eight flights of stairs. And he knew that he was being followed, because he kept to the darkest angle of the wall, jumped the last flight and disappeared into the general office.

There was no sound as Emma stopped at the foot of the stairs. She opened the door slowly, and nothing happened. She reached in and turned on the light. The room was empty. That was the disadvantage of George Washington's turning off the alarm system when they came in. It enabled other intruders to blunder about the building.

The black cat suit that she had also worn for the cemetery expedition was still in the ladies' cloakroom where she had left it. Emma nipped across, stripping off the white starched outfit as she went and threw it into an empty locker. She felt happier about tackling unknown men when she was suitably dressed. For one thing she didn't rustle as she crept out of the side door and moved round the side of the building.

There was an open window leading from the general office, and Emma assumed that if her man had come through that he would have run straight across the yard and into one of those huts beneath the high wall. Then she saw him again, crouched on the roof of a bicycle shed. And to judge from the silhouette

he was clutching something.

He was waiting up there to see whether anyone was following him, but he hadn't seen Emma. The quick-change into black would confuse him as well, because it was a white dressed matron who had leaped down the stairs five minutes ago. She kept to the shadows until she reached the building next to the bicycle shed, which turned out to be a store for chemicals and raw materials. Emma swung herself quickly on to the roof without a sound, but as she ran across, leaped the five feet on to the bicycle shed, a board creaked and the man was expecting her.

He threw the thing he was holding over the wall and then turned to meet her with fists raised defensively. A straight left jabbed out and she crumpled to the floor in time to miss the traditional right cross that always follows. She was slightly stunned, and without thinking she pitched the man backwards off the roof with a double foot lever throw. That's done by curling one foot round the ankle and pushing the man's knee with the other foot, an operation that can usually break the opponent's knee cap. But he was all right. He yelled fearsomely as he fell, and then ran off like a professional miler to the main gate.

Emma shook her head, took a few deep breaths, and went back to find George Washington. It was annoying to be caught by a man who follows the Queensbury rules. She hadn't come across anyone like that in years. Perhaps she had become too sophisticated.

George Washington had used the direct approach for interrogating the weedy doctor. He had adjusted the lights above the table so that they glared down into his eyes, and now he was sitting back, casually smoking a cigarette and waiting for Emma. From time to time he flicked the electric switch, just to remind the man that he had agreed to talk.

"Mrs. Peel," he said sadly, "I spent months learning up about the laws of evidence. Do you know that I could be disqualified for this? I think we should find a Bible for him to swear on."

"There isn't much time. Did he tell you who was behind all this?"

"Don't!" shrieked Sears, as the switch was flicked briefly. "It was Professor Feuer. He planned all this before he died."

George Washington smiled brilliantly at her. "That's what the man says, Mrs. Peel. He was Feuer's assistant at that time, and he says when the prof was sentenced to death they planned to keep his brain alive and to carry on with the work. I've tried everything to make him confess something more plausible, but he insists that Professor Feuer is still the brain behind the whole operation. The zombies are being directed by a brain in a bottle."

Emma shuddered. "But that's absurd -"

"Don't!" shrieked Sears, as the electric current prompted him again. "It's true, I swear that's the truth!"

"He says he knows that it's absurd," George Washington expanded. "That's why they mean to transplant the brain into yes-suh Mr. Steed's head."

"Don't keep calling him yes-suh!" she snapped.

"No, ma'am." He grinned at some private joke. "It's all right, Mrs. Peel, they won't hurt the boss while Professor Feuer's brain is still in that jar."

Emma turned round suddenly. "Which jar?"

The jar was missing.

"It was here this afternoon," said George Washington. "It can't have been stolen!"

Emma watched the writhing and threshing of Dr. Sears's body and she knew that he wouldn't or couldn't tell them anything. A man doesn't scream like that if a few words could stop the agony. She watched the rivers of perspiration running down the folds of naked flesh, and she felt a vindictive pleasure in his suffering. It was a revenge for what they were doing to Steed. Let him squirm like an obscene baby.

"Stop!" she called suddenly. "This is wasting time."

George Washington stopped. "If he can't help us, Mrs. Peel, I'd like to know who can."

"There's an old English saying," she murmured as she went to the door. "When all else fails, you can always turn to God. Come along, George Washington, leave him there for Dr. Manden. We're going to church."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Steed was getting quite friendly with the chimpanzee in the next cage. He talked about the day men came down from the trees and started using money. Buying trees and owning several caves that they rented out at a profit. "That day God made his second mistake," Steed said solemnly. No answer. "I suppose, you're going to ask what was his first mistake." Well it was looking curious, so Steed told him. "The first mistake was this system of insects being eaten by tiny animals, tiny animals being eaten by medium animals, medium animals... but you get the idea. And men eating all animals. I have a boss who only eats nut cutlets and grass. You'd like him."

The chimpanzee bared its teeth and squawked. It was a friendly gesture.

"I met a friend of yours the other day. Sensible beast and all that. He killed a dead man. I suppose they wanted to bring him here...."

You get lonely, cooped up for hours in a small cage. Claustrophobic as well, you have to keep your imagination severely in check or you might panic. It's better to go a little mad and talk in a civilised way to those in the same predicament. And the animal obviously felt the same way. Steed had dozed off at about three o'clock in the morning, and he'd been woken up by somebody patting him gently on the head. The chimpanzee had felt lonely. They hadn't heard Margaret Windsor come into the room.

"I presume you're an animal lover, Mr. Steed," she drawled from the doorway.

"I'll talk to anybody I have something in common with," he said amiably. "I was telling my friend that a cousin of his at London Zoo refused to come here. Killed a zombie in preference. What I don't understand is why your mob was trying to steal a chimpanzee from the zoo...."

Margaret Windsor tottered into the room on her high heeled shoes, a whisky in one hand and her cigarette holder in the other. "My dear sweet," she grated affectionately, "the chimps we have here - such as your friend - were embezzled for us by Professor Feuer. Since he died we can't get them legally because we aren't a licensed research establishment. We needed another so that meant stealing it. Such a shame it all went wrong, although I expect the publicity has been good for us." She gurgled. "There's no such thing as bad publicity, so they say."

"That depends on what you mean to achieve."

The cigarette holder wagged impishly. "I'll tell you that when your brain has been replaced."

"Will I need to be told then?" Steed raised a well groomed eyebrow. "With Professor Feuer's mind I expected to know what was going on, in fact to decide what would be going on."

But no. There was the question of memory. Steed had read somewhere that the brain has no compartment or special cells recording memory. There are patterns, thought patterns that will always be repeated like a conditioned reflex, but the recorded experiences of fifty-three Feuer years were mysteriously embedded in his nervous system, not stored in the brain. So perhaps he would still, after the operation, have Steed's memory, and thus Steed's loyalties and Steed's objectives. It was a fascinating thought, but not one to be debated with Grand Guignol herself.

"By the way," he said arrogantly, "as I shall shortly be your boss, you couldn't bring me a stiff brandy, I suppose? It would be a start in our beautiful friendship."

Mrs. Windsor looked at him clinically, blew smoke into the cage, and said, "Anything."

Two minutes later a zombie brought in a bottle of brandy.

It required three un-aesthetic snifters at the bottle to bring him to the next stage of his scheme. All right, he had charm and he was a man. But the brandy was third rate and Margaret Windsor was not a Victorian beauty. Good Lord, he reflected as he swallowed the stuff, if he only partly succeeded he might have to make love to the damned woman! It was a risk he had to take. The alternative, after all, was a fate worse than death.

"The thing about mature women," he said hollowly, "is that they are so much more mature." For the sake of the old country, he reminded himself. "Won't you stay and have a drink with me? I'm sure we'll find a few interests in common."

She smiled chillingly and held out her glass. "I'm not just mature, darling, I'm positively decadent."

By George, yes. "There's a fascination frantic in a ruin that's romantic," he murmured. "Do you think you are sufficiently decayed?" That's it, quote poetry at the old bird. Well, Gilbert and Sullivan. She wasn't offended.

She nestled down by the side of his cage and breathed alarmingly against his thigh. "The gratifying thing about being in my position," she sighed, "is that men always want to make love to me. They think it will save their skins." That amused her for a while and she gurgled into her drink. "So I've had a lot of lovers recently. It becomes monotonous. Even watching them die afterwards, like a queen bee, becomes tedious. Can you think of anything more advanced?"

"Not from here," said Steed. "There's nothing less erotic for a man than being kept in a small cage. Even gorillas in a zoo never mate and never have young. It's a fact of life. I think you'll end up quite soon as a solitary, frustrated woman. Because I shall be warped and the rest of the zombies around you will be neuter. Have some more brandy."

They had some more brandy. He watched her slowly focus her green eyes on his stomach. The imagination had to be kept down again. Making love to that rapacious bag of bones, pulled together with muscles like coils of rope, would be like making love to a thin sack of old razor blades.

"There's something rather exotic," she drawled, "about having a man in a cage. Completely at my mercy, you know. Do you enjoy being humiliated?"

"No. I'm afraid I'm a pretty conventional sort of a chap. Couldn't we play on the sofa?"

Margaret Windsor leered at him and shook her head. "You men are all the same, only interested in one thing, and that's escape. But you aren't leaving that cage "

"My dear Margaret, your imagination is already aflame and your flesh is tingling with suppressed excitement. Are you going to deny us an hour of frantic pleasure because of these bars?"

"No." She put down her glass and her cigarette holder. "I'm coming into the cage with you."

Help! He watched in appalled fascination as she unzipped the gold lame sheath and let it fall to the floor. She was wearing the briefest of black lace briefs and brassiere underneath, but she waited like a professional for him to get the maximum erotic effect. She had a scrawny stomach, dehydrated breasts and a sagging fold beneath the fleshless buttocks. It *was* erotic in a decadent way, and Steed winced while she struggled with the clasp of her brassiere. It fluttered to the ground and soon the briefs followed.

"Amazing," said Steed truthfully.

"Don't be deceived by the light," she laughed, "it's all sinew and muscle. I'll tear you to pieces."

Even in her bare feet she walked like a drunken queen whose elegance is skin deep. She walked tightly to the door and whistled. When two zombies appeared she said, "Stand here by the door while I romp with Mr. Steed. If he tries to escape you know what to do."

The two zombies came into the laboratory and watched impassively while she walked back to the cage, unlocked the door and climbed in. The heat radiated from her body before Steed had even touched her.

"I don't mind you being rough," she gasped as Steed seized her shoulders.

"Don't be obscene," he snapped.

When Margaret Windsor closed the cage door he bent her over and jammed her head into the bars. She screamed, and the scream died abruptly as he brought the side of his hand down on the base of her neck. It hurt his hand, but the woman slumped heavily to the floor so he assumed it had been correct.

"Keep away," he called as the zombies ran across the laboratory with guns drawn. He picked up the limp body and held it in front of him as a shield. The warm flesh made him shudder, but this was no time for delicacy. He slipped down from the cage and worked his way round to the chimpanzee. It was still friendly, and when he unlocked the cage with the same key the animal lumbered out making aggressive noises at the zombies.

"Sorry to be ungallant, old thing," Steed murmured to the woman as he laid her on the floor. "Perhaps some other time...."

She moaned, but she stayed where she was.

The zombies were too slow. They were still watching the chimpanzee when Steed ducked under the operating table and ran to the door. Another man ran at him from the hall, so Steed stepped smartly aside at the last moment and tripped him into the room. For a man who deplores violence, he reflected, he was surviving pretty well. He closed the door behind him and ignored the shots and crashing of objects in the room. His friend was quite capable of taking care of himself. He ran up the stairs in search of something to wear.

Steed found that the upper part of the house was completely empty. He went from room to room and found evidence of a rapid flight. Clearly at least twenty people had been eating and sleeping on the premises. They had left, recently and precipitately, without bothering to clear up the evidence. There were unmade bunks and unwashed kitchen utensils, dirty washing.... Steed was disturbed about this sudden activity.

He had no idea where they might have gone.

While he was searching for some appropriate clothes Steed heard someone coming up the stairs. The brawl was obviously over. He turned out the lights and waited for the victor to appear. It was the chimpanzee. It ambled slowly along the corridor until it reached the broken window at the far end. There was a full moon shining through the window, and the ape stared at it for several seconds, trying to reach a decision.

It decided to climb out of the window, but when it touched the metal frame it squealed with pain and jumped back. Steed assumed the steel was electrified. The chimpanzee was of the same opinion. It sat on the wooden window sill and considered the problem. Then it stood up, leaned through the broken glass, and jumped.

Steed went across to the window. "What about your old comrade in arms?" he called. There was a tree some fifteen feet away and the ape was swinging unconcernedly to the ground. So much for casual acquaintances. It wouldn't bother to fetch help.

Steed went back downstairs to examine the wreckage. As usual the fragile zombies had succumbed; when someone came to continue this work scientifically he would have to devise a way to make healthy and vigorous zombies. Dynamic, abrasive, thrusting zombies for moving into the future in competition with the rest of the world. Margaret Windsor, on the other hand, seemed to have recovered. She was speaking to somebody on the telephone.

"I had to send them off tonight," she was saying, "because someone followed Steed to the house. We couldn't have the police turning up and finding a houseful of dead men. So you'll just have to put the raid forward to this weekend."

Steed picked up the extension receiver in the hall and listened to her explanations of why the plans had gone wrong and how Steed had escaped by bribing one of the dead guards.

"All right," said the voice at the other end, "we shall proceed this weekend. Stay there until I contact you." A rather hollow, booming voice with the authority of an actor. He had put down the receiver before Steed could place him more accurately.

Margaret Windsor was stark naked except for the gun she was holding. She came into the hall and pointed it deliberately at Steed's chest. Reminding him of that woman-spurned remark of old Shakespeare's. She was obviously prepared to fire it.

"All right," said Steed, "I surrender."

"We aren't taking prisoners in this battle."

"Who followed me to this house?" he asked, just to keep talking, because when they stopped talking he would be dead.

Margaret Windsor smiled with the tip of her tongue between her lips. She was savouring the delicate pleasure of her work. "He was the most sexual Negro you've ever seen, and I wanted him. But next time round I'll kill him."

"Sex seems to be your problem," Steed murmured. "Could I have my clothes before you kill me?"

"No," she drawled. "Come over here, slowly." She wagged a beckoning finger. "You can kiss me as you die."

Steed forced a debonair smile and walked towards the gun. His knees felt slightly weak and the three yards seemed a hideously long way. The metal barrel was cold against his stomach and her teeth sunk into his bottom lip. This was no way for a gentleman to die. Or no way to make love, depending on how you

looked at it. He put his arms round her shoulders, but that was as far as his struggle went. She suddenly wrenched Steed's hair and dragged him to the floor as the gun went off.

She gurgled, coughed briefly, and a trickle of blood ran down the side of her mouth. Steed pulled himself out of her dead embrace. There was a bullet hole under the side of her left breast. He stood up shakily and looked about to see who had killed the woman.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The lights were on in the church and a service seemed to be in progress. Emma climbed out of the tiny Lotus Elan with George Washington. They listened to the strains of '*Hail the day that sees him rise*' floating out on the night air. The midnight service had obviously overrun by several hours. They tried to open the door, but it was locked.

Emma was good with locks and this one took her ninety seconds. Then they crept into the church. "It's almost like during the war," she whispered, "when churches were used as dormitories for the homeless."

Message Morrison was standing in front of the altar, giving his congregation a short pep talk. About twenty awkward characters in the front three rows, lounging disinterestedly and joining in the hymns, croaking 'Amen' at the appropriate moments, and in the back row were three meths men who must have come in by mistake. The meths men had a bottle of communion wine which they were passing back and forth.

Morrison was talking about this great scientific discovery and its potential for world peace. "Science is not merely science," he was saying in that sepulchral voice, "it is a means for doing either good or evil."

"Man," said George Washington audibly, "am I mad or are they crazy?"

"It's only the vicar who's odd," said Emma. "You're not going to panic again?"

"With your example before me?" He sounded quite resentful.

The assembled zombies began singing another hymn and Message Morrison was stalking down the aisle towards them. But there was no organist, and by the end of the first verse the singing had straggled into silence. They remained silent, so that the vicar's voice echoed loudly in the cavernous church.

"It's Mrs. Peel, isn't it?" he called. "What a pleasure to meet you again so soon."

"Yes," said Emma, "twice in one night." She emerged into the half light of the church. "You punched me on the nose."

"I beg your pardon?"

"It's all right, don't apologise. Isn't it strange how one never recognises a vicar in plain clothes? It was your domed head that gave you away in the moonlight. I do hope the fall didn't do any damage...."

Morrison stared at her for a moment and then shook his head. "Not at all,

Mrs. Peel. I was a keen athlete until very recently. You must forgive the straight left, but you took me by surprise." He was peering suspiciously at George Washington in the shadows. "Is this another of Steed's under-cover chaps? Forgive my asking, but you were standing there like a couple who were too shy to ask for my professional services. Ho ho ho."

He shook hands with George Washington and then invited them to come and chat with the zombies.

"They don't meet many people, I'm afraid, and they aren't too well adjusted to society. That's why I keep the door locked. But we're making progress. They are responding gradually."

George Washington remained at the back of the church but Emma went with the vicar to the altar.

"Now, boys, pay attention," the vicar called with a clap of the hands. "This lady is Mrs. Peel and she's come here specially to see how we're treating you."

Emma raised a hand in salute at the rows of apathetic faces. A meths man applauded briefly.

"Would you like to say a few words to them, Mrs. Peel?"

"No, really, I wouldn't know what to say," she confessed. "I'm still bewildered to see them here."

Message Morrison beamed patriarchally and explained how he first discovered one of these chaps in the cemetery three months ago. "He was a pathetic fellow, quite lost in the living world. He'd been recovered from a grave in the upper part of the grounds, and after they brought him back to life he strayed off. Nowhere to go, I suppose, and he found his way back to the last resting place. Naturally I brought him over here."

Morrison patted a surly fellow on the shoulder. "After that I decided to help them, to make this a kind of mission centre for the dead, you know. They were so neglected, Mrs. Peel, and yet they are God's creatures. As I said in church the other day, they are living proof of God's purpose. They have been raised on the third day, and they are witnesses that the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

"What do you propose to do with them?" asked Emma.

"Save them," he answered simply.

"Is that why you destroyed Professor Feuer's brain?"

"Yes. Professor Feuer was a scientist, and if he had been given the means through Steed's body of controlling this work again, he would have ruined everything." He shrugged awkwardly, like a bald eagle hunching its feathers. "Besides, old Steed is a friend of mine."

"You know a lot..."

"I've talked a lot with my friends. Unlike you, Mrs. Peel, I treated them as

people. You only saw them as things, and you killed them as if they were insects." He shook his head in sorrowful rebuke.

"I'm sorry."

"They must be treated with respect. After all, this is the biggest step forward in conquering death since Christ Himself was raised from the dead. Isn't it? The great discoveries in science for many centuries have been discoveries of bombs and means to destroy God's work. Since 1945 we've lived with the threat of annihilation constantly hanging over us. But these men demonstrate that the world is about to be changed."

Emma didn't know whether to applaud or sit in a pew and keep quiet. She remembered Steed saying that the vicar had been associated with every good cause from Oxfam to the Society for the Preservation of Old Highgate. But men who see everything in the perspective of a world view stretching back to Christ were baffling. They were often dangerous.

"Professor Feuer thought he had invented a scientific gimmick," the vicar said scathingly. "And he was going to use it to give himself a few more years for research! Do you know what he wanted to do? All he wanted was another research laboratory, his old staff, and a few more years work. He just had no idea what his work meant. It was work, for its own sake. So I stepped in, I decided to *use* these people."

"For peace, I heard you say it." She sighed. "This is where we get to the interesting bit." She had guessed that Message Morrison was behind all the publicity. He had deliberately created the newspaper scare, but Emma hadn't known why. She hadn't thought of the crusading church blundering into someone else's pursuit of pure science. She wished they weren't still standing around in the gothic church. It gave the vicar a psychological advantage, cloaked in black and surrounded by the symbols of Christianity. "What are you going to do with these people?"

Morrison wandered over to the lectern and tapped uncertainly on the Bible. "What would you do?" he asked. "Remember, you can go anywhere, do anything. All you need to do is have a few guards or a top official declared dead, and then you can bring them back to life as Feuer's gangsters brought back the D.S.R. people. By those means you could obtain any official secret from the Foreign Office, you could go into the Royal Mint one weekend and run off a few million pounds, you could steal an atomic aeroplane and bomb the Pentagon.... I suppose you could dominate the world."

"I wouldn't do anything," said Emma. "I don't need a few million pounds, and I'm too busy to dominate the world. So what was your idea?"

"You'll see." He chuckled paternally at the benefits he would bring to the

world. Then he stopped suddenly. "Where is George Washington?"

"He's gone to fetch Steed from that place in Hertfordshire," she said loudly, hoping that he had. "And at the same time he'll be sending the police into the Department of Scientific Research to arrest Dr. Sears. I'm staying here with you."

"Wouldn't you rather come with us on our mission?" he asked innocently. "It's a great opportunity."

"We'll talk about that when Steed comes."

Morrison shook his head like a sad old owl. "Steed never did like my methods. He said I'm an unholy meeting of the Bible belt and Madison Avenue."

"You'll be able to go round knocking on doors," said Emma, "making a present of everlasting life to everyone with a Bible in the house." She felt a little guilty about saying that, but she still couldn't work out whether she was dealing with a dangerous lunatic or a batty saint.

"Better than that," said Morrison. "Come on, lads, it's time we moved. Briefing is now over."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Steed stood up shakily and looked about to see who had killed the woman. He saw George Washington standing at the top of the stairs giving a mock salute. "Thanks for coming in time," said Steed.

"Always glad to be of service to the British Empire, sir-missah-Steed."

Ten minutes later they were speeding back to London in George Washington's red Jaguar. Steed had found his clothes in a cupboard under the stairs. He could relax again; he watched the countryside flash past and smoked a panatella while George Washington explained about Message Morrison.

"As soon as I got the picture I split and left Mrs. Peel with the vicar. She can look after herself, goddamn, whereas the last time I'd seen you you were in a cage."

"No need to put it like that," murmured Steed.

"But I came equipped this time, with a grappling iron to reach the window and a gun to shoot my way through..." He seemed rather proud of his exploit.

"You didn't meet a chimpanzee in the grounds, I suppose?"

George Washington looked suspicious. "No."

"Just wondered," said Steed. "Friend of mine." They were in a hurry to reach the church, of course, but George Washington was driving as if he'd read the Jaguar advertisements. "Have you driven a six and a half litre 1929 Bentley?" Steed asked. "Very safe cars, Bentleys."

Dawn was breaking over the ridge of Highgate Hill, a cold grey light creeping around the houses, showing up each building with sudden, harsh clarity. Steed shivered. "You should never watch the dawn come up in London unless you've just fallen in love," he said cryptically. It was light by the time they drew up outside the church.

"Shouldn't we be careful?" whispered George Washington.

"No no, old Message Morrison is a friend of mine from the army days. He won't fire on us or anything like that. He just needs a straight talk..."

But Message Morrison was gone. So were the zombies. And there was no trace of Emma. The church was completely deserted. "They've taken off on their mission," said George Washington.

They found three meths men in the vestry but they took no notice while Steed searched through the drawers and shelves for signs of a destination.

"Washington!" Steed called. "Come into the vestry. I need you to remember

precisely what the vicar said to Mrs. Peel. What were the alternatives he listed?"

"Yes suh boss," said Washington. "He thought they could go into the Royal Mint and print ten million pounds. But that can be ruled out because the Mint only manufactures coins. Then he said they could steal official secrets from the Foreign Office or steal an aeroplane and drop bombs on the Pentagon."

Steed smiled in spite of himself. "Poor old Message, he wouldn't recognise an official secret if it was stamped with Hands Off. And besides, he's a patriot. He wouldn't sell his country for money."

"He's left wing," said George Washington, "he belongs to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament."

"The Prime Minister," said Steed, "belongs to the Labour Party, but he isn't left wing."

George Washington was crushed. "All right," he said, "that leaves stealing an aeroplane and dropping H-bombs on the Pentagon."

"Why should he do that?"

"He said he was going to use this scientific discovery to bring about peace on earth. He's a nut, Mr. Steed, and he might think bombing the Pentagon will help."

"Good God, it would cause a third world war!" But that had to be his plan. To steal one of those American planes that are kept on constant alert to take off with nuclear bombs as soon as war is declared. That would explain why one of the zombies they killed had been a U.S. serviceman. And why Thorburn had found it difficult to check on him.

Thorburn lived in a Georgian square in Islington. A basement flat that was always half dark. The steps were presumably Georgian as well, and they had last been cleaned in 1784. Steed knocked for nearly ten minutes before Thorburn staggered blearily to the door.

"Thought we'd join you for breakfast," said Steed. "Lucky we popped round or you'd have overslept this morning."

"It's Saturday," he groaned. "I'm not working today."

"Wrong, old boy. You have to pick up a Dr. Sears from the Department of Scientific Research and then clear up the mess in a place called Radlett. There might be a few stray bods drifting about there and we need them pulled in. Where do I sit to eat my porridge? Washington, see whether there's a chair in this damned flat. You live like a monk, Thorburn, in a cell."

"I enjoy simplicity -"

"Give me Danton, Brutus, Goering, every time instead of you lean and hungry fellows. I hope you don't put salt in your porridge?" The table was littered with correspondence, newspapers and half finished reports, the dusty

books in one corner were mainly government publications, and the floor was cold concrete graced with one small rush mat. He lived simply. Even his bed in the next room was a pallet on the floor. The only evidence of humanity was a massive loudspeaker in the middle of the room, and that dominated the place like a graven image. The records, naturally, were all modern jazz.

"So this case is all cleared up?" said Thorburn wearily.

"Yes," said Steed, "we were working while you basked in the luxury of your warm bed. The whole thing was planned by Feuer and executed by Dr. Sears and Margaret Windsor. Amen. By the way, do we know anything about Miss Windsor? She didn't seem to be a scientist. Perhaps she was just a rich patron who provided the house and a little immoral support."

"I think she was on the D.S.R. management committee as well," said George Washington. "The local councillor type who does good work on Wednesday afternoons."

"So what were they doing that was illegal?" asked Thorburn.

"Killing human beings with artificially induced heart attacks, so that they could use them for research. It's not really allowed, you know. But Sears is a keen scientist! He went along with the scheme in the name of progress. He's an idealist. He even killed Jacob Burns when it seemed that their game was attracting too much attention. He didn't know that attention was what Miss Windsor had agreed to promote. He didn't know much about women."

"Man," said George Washington, "was that a woman?"

Steed nodded. "But we mustn't forget amid all this friendly domestic chat why we've come here. There's a small detail still waiting to be cleared up. A mad vicar found out what was going on and he muscled in with a game of his own. He probably threatened to expose them unless he could play as well. So now he's off trying to steal a U.2 bomber."

Thorburn stopped picking the sleep out of his eyes and gaped. "Not Morrison?"

"Morrison. Which is why I need to know where that dead American serviceman was from."

"Of course." Thorburn turned over the piles of papers on his table and eventually found a blue report on the floor. "He was from a place just outside Oxford. The funny thing is that nearly a dozen American servicemen died there recently. An epidemic of heart diseases."

"Amazing," said Steed.

Emma could see what was happening through the perspex lid of the coffin. "I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Peel, but this will be for less than fifteen minutes. There's no other certain way of getting us all on to the plane." She could see two

American air force uniforms in the hearse with Message Morrison, and she knew that eight more U.S. airmen were in the car behind.

The simplicity of the scheme amused her. They pulled up at the gates of the most closely guarded establishment in England, the dead airmen showed their papers, they explained that Emma was an American serviceman's wife being flown home and that Morrison was the religious escort. And they were waved through. They were in an atomic air base.

An airman saluted the driver as they were going through the maze of buildings by the control tower, and then he stopped. "Hey, Joe! I thought you were dead."

Joe leaned out of the hearse and yelled back. "So did I." Then he sped on towards the eight U.2s that were maintained in constant readiness for immediate takeoff. Message Morrison had remarked that it was either immediate or nothing, but the zombies had assured him that the American airforce was a hundred percent efficient, dad.

The men were slow in thought, and it was partly because some part of their imagination was killed that they were so obedient to their new masters, but in performing the tasks they'd been trained for they were perfect. Half-way down the mile-long tarmac they raced to the planes and screeched to a halt by the first hatch. It would now take slightly less than a minute for the security guards to reach them.

Emma was bumped around in the coffin and then she was handed into the plane. A lone mechanic had come running from the next plane and she caught a glimpse of him succumbing to the vicar's straight left. Then the doors were closed and the crew was working towards take-off. She was deafened momentarily by the roar of the jets, the roar rose and fell, then subsided into a steady hum as the plane moved forward.

She had to restrain a feeling of triumph as the vicar prised open the coffin for her. After all, it had been tense and they had succeeded so far, but she was on the other side.

"I think we've made it," said Morrison.

"With God on your side," she snapped. "Why did you have to bring me along as well?"

Morrison shrugged apologetically, and then flapped his hands. "Because the British government should protect you. I've been a little nervous in case they shoot us down, but with you aboard we should be safe." He smiled uncertainly. "Do you mind?"

"Of course I - *mind!* I don't approve of dropping H-bombs on anybody. I think you're mad. And if this was a normal turbine engine I'd bash you over the

head and just turn the plane round. Unfortunately I can't pilot a jet."

The plane lifted suddenly, seemed to pause a few feet off the ground and then soared out in to the sky. They were away.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"You can't shoot the thing down," said Steed, "because there's a lady on board. She's a British agent. And anyway, won't that H-bomb explode or something?"

"Only if the detonator is connected," said the colonel. "We'll shoot it down over the Atlantic. We've had enough of you wise guys in the under-developed countries. We spend millions of dollars on your defence and what happens? We get parades of long-haired beatniks demonstrating against freedom outside the embassies. Jokers who throw paint on the American president's car. Why does that crazy vicar want to bomb the Pentagon, for God's sake?" Texan, tough and Stirling Hayden. He was a man with a job to do. "If there's a British agent on board," he said as an afterthought, "why doesn't she do something?"

"I don't know," said Steed. "Could I have a word with her over your radio?"

"They don't answer," said a private in the corner. "Perhaps they don't know how it works...."

"Listen, butch, those are American airmen up there, they know all there is to know."

"In that case you'd better evacuate the Pentagon."

"We'll shoot the plane down."

The Texan was scarlet with four large whiskies and rage, stomping round his office while Steed sat blandly offering advice. Steed had been there for nearly an hour, the fighter planes had been with the bomber for almost as long, waiting for instructions to fire, and high level telephone calls had been made between ministers and the army.

A private had been sitting in the corner of the room jerking rhythmically to the beat of his transistor radio, chewing gum, he probably pulled K.P. and knew what that expression meant. Something to do with cleaning out the latrines, probably. He had a crew-cut and maybe a mother in Wisconsin who read the *New Yorker*. Private Salinger. He suddenly said, "Hey, Chuck, listen to this. It's that kook on the news."

The kook was Message Morrison, but by the time they had registered the fact the news item was over. "He said he isn't going to bomb the Pentagon," Private Salinger shouted. "The jerk isn't going to bomb the Pentagon!"

"So what's he going to do?" asked Steed.

The Private scratched his head. "Nothing. He's just going to land at Kennedy

airport."

"Kooky," said the colonel.

Steed snatched the blue telephone from the colonel's desk and put through a call to the B.B.C. "I'll speak to Carlton-Greene himself," he said. That took a little arranging, with names and top-priority code words repeated to a switchboard operator, a secretary, an administrative assistant and then the man himself. Meanwhile the colonel took up a symbolic position before a wall map of the Atlantic.

"Hugh, hello. John Steed here. I wonder if you could give me the full text of that message you've received from Morrison?"

The colonel and Private Salinger hunched over the receiver with him and listened to Message Morrison's press statement. It had apparently been delivered that morning by a choirboy.

"I could have wiped out Washington with this H-bomb," said the press statement, "but that wasn't my intention. I am a minister of God's church and in this plane with me are men who have been raised from the dead. We represent the forces of Life. These men have been called zombies, but they are the crew of this plane. When we land peacefully at Kennedy airport to demonstrate God's word, please treat my crew with respect."

"Billy Graham will seethe with envy when he hears that," laughed Emma Peel.

She could see the coast line of New York in the distance, a city stretching up towards the sky, glittering like a model in the sunlight. It was early morning again in America. She watched the city rush at them and then slide past underneath. The crew were shouting to each other through the internal radio and grinning triumphantly. They were excited to be home, and Emma herself was strangely elated to be back in a country she hadn't expected to visit again so soon.

To her surprise there were crowds of cheering people waiting at Kennedy airport and a brass band had found its way on to the landing strip. Perhaps they were heroes. As they were talked down to the runway she could see television cameras and a swarm of reporters. There were also four police cars and something like a battalion of troops. The fighter planes that had flown alongside across the Atlantic remained circling in the sky.

They made a perfect landing and Message Morrison swooped about the plane shaking hands, congratulating the crew.

"What happens now?" asked Emma.

Morrison beamed happily. "Look out of the window. I suppose I shall be arrested. But it has all been worth it. Look at the publicity!"

"You'll be defrocked."

"Perhaps. But tell John Steed that I beat him this time. He'll have to buy me a drink when I'm released. I may be a fool, but I'm a fool on a larger scale than I was during the war."

"I'll tell him."

The steps had been driven alongside the plane and a minor riot had broken out between the police and reporters. "Here we go," said Morrison. "I feel something like St. Stephen must have felt at the end." He wasn't aiming too high in his analogies.

Message Morrison stepped out of the plane and waved to the cheering crowds behind the crush barrier. "I bring you tidings of great joy," he announced, and everybody laughed. It was just like old times.

Emma hoped the television cameras would be gone by the time she appeared. The crew went out next and were treated with great curiosity. She hadn't come dressed for public appearances. Tight black pants and a gabardine tunic were all very well as working clothes.... She watched the police lead Morrison away. Perhaps he knew what he was doing. She tossed her hair back, straightened her sweater, and went out.

"Mrs. Peel?"

It was a man from the C.I.A. Emma smiled at him and gave her personal assurance that the H-bomb was still intact. The band was playing '*A Hard Day's Night*', as a tribute to the British, and it seemed apt enough. Emma suddenly realised she was tired again.

"What a kook," said the man from the C.I.A. "They'll either send him to the chair or make him the next pope. He's too dangerous to be a vicar."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Steed gestured with his umbrella towards Karl Marx. "I wonder what he would say if he knew how much trouble has been made in his name? He looks quite an affable character."

They walked on, paused by Galsworthy's grave to reflect on Edwardian England, and sighed. "Did you know that there's a joke in one of Galsworthy's plays?" Steed asked. "In *The Silver Box* the lad's mother says 'Tell them the truth and say you didn't steal it.' Poor Galsworthy was quite shattered on the first night when the audience laughed. He never made that mistake again."

They looked for George Eliot's grave but they couldn't find it.

"I've grown quite attached to this place," said Emma. "It's really beautiful, with all this tangle of bushes and weeds overgrowing on to the tombs. I'm sure that if dead men ever do walk again then this is where they'll want to walk. In about six weeks when the trees begin to flower and the buds open...."

They walked down the hill past a news vendor who was shouting, "Ten years for the Flying Vicar. Full report!" They bought the evening paper and read about the trial. Poor old Message Morrison. He had been charged under the Defence of the Realm Act. It would be many years before Steed bought him that drink.

The bishop of this and that, the Church establishment and the voices of authority had all paid public tribute to his sincerity, regretted his zeal and condemned his irresponsibility. It seemed as if he would be defrocked. Unless they made him a prison chaplain.

"He's lucky they didn't charge him with being directly responsible for the deaths of those servicemen who flew the plane," said Steed.

"He says Margaret Windsor had a G.I. complex. She recruited them for herself."

"I'd like to see him convince anyone of that who didn't know Margaret Windsor."

"Anyway," said Emma, "those Americans are still alive."

"I suppose they are." Steed smiled. "I wonder whether they'll receive six weeks back pay."

They went across the road and into the Dragon. Roderick had promised them a small celebration, and after that they were to be sworn on the horns. It was an old custom, making them Freemen of the village of Highgate.

The saloon bar of the Dragon was unusually full for early evening, unusually

loud with music and laughter. Roderick greeted them with cries of "My dears, how delightful!" and "Look at the sensational Mrs. Peel." He kissed Emma on both cheeks. "This is what's known as an art nouveau shift over Bermuda shorts," he crowed.

"Correct."

"I do wish I was narrower in the hips, duckie, so that I could try them on; But I'll never be 36-22-38 again. Steed, you look as elegant as ever. Let me break a bottle of my finest brandy to drink with your pork pie." He held himself together and rubbed his sides while he laughed at the joke.

"There's the copper who put the vicar away," said one of the inhabitants in the corner.

"No he didn't, he killed them zombies."

"He doesn't look like a copper."

A fleshy woman with white hair joined in song with the piped music and an Irishman was persuaded to dance with his wife. It's a hard job to create atmosphere in an English pub. But Roderick did his best. He even played '*For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*' on eight brass mugs hanging above the bar.

"Shall we take the floor?" Emma asked when it became obvious that Steed wouldn't ask her.

"I last executed a sedate waltz on V. J. night twenty-one years ago," he pronounced. "I pulled a muscle in the thigh."

He watched while Emma and Roderick hurled themselves about the floor in erotic jungle rhythms. They seemed possessed with a wild frenzy. Steed was almost glad that George Washington wasn't here to reduce Mrs. Peel to exhaustion. He'd been sent off on another mission, sweeping floors in an electronics factory.

While the noise increased and the booze flowed towards the pagan ritual of the evening Steed concentrated his mind on real culture. Poetry. There was a framed verse by Byron above the fireplace.

Many to the steep of Highgate hie.

Ask, ye Boetian shades, the reason why?

Tis to the worship of the solemn Horn

Grasped in the holy hand of Mystery

In whose dread name both men and maids are sworn

And consecrate the oath with draught and dance till morn.

Not one of Byron's better efforts, but then very little of his efforts were. Steed wondered how the ceremony of the horns had arisen. Very phallic. He hoped it wasn't designed to send him chasing after Mrs. Peel in a mad spasm of desire. You have to be careful of things like that.

When she staggered back to the table Steed shouted his congratulations.

"It was strenuous," she called back, "because I was dancing the man's role."

Roderick banged for silence on a brass bell over the counter. "Silence, ladies and gentlemen, for the ceremony! Mr. John Steed and Mrs. Emma Peel are about to become Freemen of the village of Highgate."

The local alcoholics had clearly scented the prospect of free beer and the place was crowded. Steed and Emma went to the bar and waited idiotically for their Freedom. The ceremony was designed to send him chasing after Mrs. Peel. She was warm and beautiful. He resented the narcissistic kisses that Roderick was showering her with. Steed put his arm round her shoulders while they drank the ritual beer.

The horns were Saxon drinking horns, but placed on his head they reminded Steed of the cuckold symbol. "Excuse me, Roderick, but you've kissed Mrs. Peel so much that you've almost washed her."

The bar waited in silence while Roderick read out the scroll of privilege:

"If at any time you are going through Highgate, and want to rest yourself, and you see a pig lying in a ditch, you have the liberty to kick her out and take her place; but if you see three lying together, you must only kick out the middle one and lie between the other two.

God save the Queen."

"God save the Queen," shouted everyone in the bar.

The dancing resumed, the music grew louder and the beer flowed. After all, Steed was paying for it now. He smiled at Mrs. Peel and decided to tell her that she was this and that. Unfortunately, being an undercover man and all that, I mean, you can't fall in love, you see. Part of the price we pay, don't you think? She had very large brown eyes.

"All right, all right, all right! What's all this bleedin' noise?" It was a policeman. "We've had complaints from every house within a mile of this place. So what's going on?"

Steed rose unsteadily to his feet and began to explain that it was his fault. After all, they were men doing a job. Fine chaps working under difficulties. That sort of thing. "I mean, Mrs. Peel and I are freemen of the village of Highgate, you see. So we were paying for the drinks and giving everyone a decent riot."

"Are you trying to be funny? What's free in Highgate?"

Steed smiled. "A place between two pigs if you see three lying in a ditch -"

"Hey, you," the policeman called to Roderick, "is this man having a party?"

Roderick said yes.

"Okay, you can both come down to the station with me. We'll sort out the pig business there. Come on, and you, sweetheart."

Emma and Steed waved sadly to the people in the bar and followed the policeman. They had a car of their own, but so had the policeman. He just didn't like people who caused riots. They sat in the back seat with another policeman between them, and the car sped off towards Kentish Town.